

RISING TERROR GROUPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ALEXANDRIA STAFFORD
EDITOR



Terrorism, Hot Spots and Conflict-Related Issues

NOVA

TERRORISM, HOT SPOTS AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES

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FROM A DECLARATION OF PARTICIPANTS JOINTLY ADOPTED BY A COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION AND A COMMITTEE OF PUBLISHERS.

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PREFACE

This book examines Al Qaeda-affiliated groups in the Middle East and Africa, as well as the "Islamic State," and Nigeria's Boko Haram.

Chapter 1 – After more than a decade of combating Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States now faces an increasingly diverse threat from Al Qaeda affiliates in the Middle East and Africa and from emerging groups that have adopted aspects of Al Qaeda's ideology but operate relatively or completely autonomously from the group's senior leadership.

U.S. counterterrorism debates have focused on "formal" Al Qaeda affiliates, and policymakers increasingly are considering options for addressing the range of threats posed by the wider spectrum of groups inspired by—or similar in goals and aspirations to—Al Qaeda. An additional challenge is the fluid nature of the threat, given the apparent fragmentation of Al Qaeda, and Ayman al Zawahiri's struggle to assert leadership of the group in light of challengers such as Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Finally, concerns regarding these issues might shape ongoing reevaluations of the federal statutes that underpin current U.S. counterterrorism policy, including the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF, P.L. 107-40).

In addition to the AUMF, Congress has addressed the emergence of Al Qaeda affiliates through a number of channels, including oversight of executive branch counterterrorism policies and practices; authorization and appropriations of U.S. funds for counterterrorism operations; and assistance for partner nations engaged in such operations.

Note: In addition to focusing on Al Qaeda affiliates, or groups that have publicly sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda leadership and been formally accepted as affiliates, this report also profiles a selection of other groups such as the Islamic State (formerly known as ISIL or ISIS) and Boko Haram.

Chapter 2 – The Islamic State is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that has expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria since 2013, threatening the security of both countries and drawing increased attention from the international community. There is debate over the degree to which the Islamic State organization might represent a direct terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland or to U.S. facilities and personnel in the region.

The Islamic State (IS) was initially part of the insurgency against coalition forces in Iraq and has in the years since the 2011 U.S. withdrawal from Iraq expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria. The Islamic State has thrived in the disaffected Sunni tribal areas of Iraq and in the remote provinces of Syria torn by the civil war. In the summer of 2014, Islamic State-led forces, supported by Sunni Arab tribalists and groups linked to ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, advanced along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, seizing multiple population centers including Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Since then, IS forces have massacred Iraqi civilians, often from ethnic or religious minorities, and recently executed two American journalists who had been held in captivity. The Islamic State's tactics have drawn the ire of the international community, increasing U.S. attention on Iraq's political problems and on the civil war in Syria.

On September 10, President Obama announced a multifaceted strategy to “degrade, and ultimately destroy” the Islamic State organization. The announced strategy is for the United States to lead and expand a multilateral coalition that will undertake direct military action, provide support for partner ground forces in Iraq and Syria, gather and share intelligence and use financial measures to try to progressively shrink the geographic and political space, manpower, and financial resources available to the Islamic State. The Administration and its allies all have ruled out deploying combat forces to either Iraq or Syria.

Some assert that the U.S. strategy will attract the support of Sunnis in both Syria and Iraq in a broad effort to defeat the Islamic State. Others assess that the strategy might have minimal effect because local anti-IS forces will not have support from U.S. or other western combat troops.

Chapter 3 – Boko Haram, a violent Nigerian Islamist movement, has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in recent years, drawing on a narrative of resentment and vengeance for state abuses to elicit recruits and sympathizers. The group's April 2014 abduction of almost 300 schoolgirls has drawn international attention, including from the Obama Administration and Members of Congress. Periodic

attacks against foreign targets in the region and growing evidence of ties to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a regional terrorist network affiliated with Al Qaeda, have also raised the concern of U.S. policy makers. The State Department named several individuals linked to Boko Haram, including its leader, Abubakar Shekau, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2012, and Boko Haram was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S. State Department in November 2013. The Obama Administration does not currently consider Boko Haram to be an affiliate of Al Qaeda.

More than 5,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence, making it one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world. U.N. and Nigerian officials report that more than 6 million Nigerians have been affected by the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, and more than 300,000 have been displaced. The group has focused on a wide range of targets, but civilians in the impoverished, predominately Muslim northeast have borne the brunt of the violence. Nigeria's heavy-handed response to Boko Haram's insurgent and terrorist operations has also taken a toll on civilians and complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation with the Nigerian government, in spite of shared concerns about Boko Haram and its ties to regional and international terrorist groups and operatives. Coordination on counterterrorism efforts has also been hampered at times by a lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials.

U.S. policy toward Boko Haram reflects both the Administration's perception of the threat the group poses and the strategic importance of the U.S. relationship with Nigeria. At this point, Boko Haram appears to pose a threat primarily to stability in northern Nigeria, and potentially to surrounding areas in neighboring countries. Some of Boko Haram's attacks have targeted Christian communities in the north, threatening to fuel existing religious tensions in the country. The group also poses a threat to international targets, including Western citizens, in the region.

The Nigerian government has struggled to respond to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram. Multiple factors have constrained the Nigerian security force response, notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. By many accounts, Nigerian troops are not adequately resourced or equipped to counter the insurgency. The government has been criticized in domestic and international press reports for what has been widely perceived as a slow response to the abduction of the schoolgirls in April, and to offers of international assistance in support of the investigation and possible rescue efforts. To date, it remains unclear to what extent Nigerian officials are

cooperating with foreign advisors and experts, including those from the United States.

Some Members of Congress have engaged in deliberations with the Administration for several years about the extent to which Boko Haram poses a threat to the United States. Legislation was introduced in both the 112th and 113th Congresses to press the State Department to designate the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. More recently, some Members expressed support through various public statements and correspondence for efforts to find and rescue the abducted schoolgirls, including a letter to President Obama signed by all 20 female Senators that urged further sanctions on the group. Related legislation includes S.Res. 433 and H.Res. 573.

Chapter 4 – Testimony of Dr. Dafna H. Rand, Center for a New American Security.

Chapter 1

**AL QAEDA-AFFILIATED GROUPS:
MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA^{*}**

***Carla E. Humud, Alexis Arieff, Lauren Ploch Blanchard,
Christopher M. Blanchard, Jeremy M. Sharp
and Kenneth Katzman***

SUMMARY

After more than a decade of combating Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States now faces an increasingly diverse threat from Al Qaeda affiliates in the Middle East and Africa and from emerging groups that have adopted aspects of Al Qaeda's ideology but operate relatively or completely autonomously from the group's senior leadership.

U.S. counterterrorism debates have focused on "formal" Al Qaeda affiliates, and policymakers increasingly are considering options for addressing the range of threats posed by the wider spectrum of groups inspired by—or similar in goals and aspirations to—Al Qaeda. An additional challenge is the fluid nature of the threat, given the apparent fragmentation of Al Qaeda, and Ayman al Zawahiri's struggle to assert leadership of the group in light of challengers such as Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Finally, concerns regarding these issues might shape ongoing reevaluations of the federal statutes that underpin current

^{*} This is an edited, reformatted and augmented version of a Congressional Research Service publication, No. R43756, dated October 10, 2014.

U.S. counterterrorism policy, including the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF, P.L. 107-40).

In addition to the AUMF, Congress has addressed the emergence of Al Qaeda affiliates through a number of channels, including oversight of executive branch counterterrorism policies and practices; authorization and appropriations of U.S. funds for counterterrorism operations; and assistance for partner nations engaged in such operations.

Note: In addition to focusing on Al Qaeda affiliates, or groups that have publicly sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda leadership and been formally accepted as affiliates, this report also profiles a selection of other groups such as the Islamic State (formerly known as ISIL or ISIS) and Boko Haram.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 2001 attacks of September 11, groups espousing Al Qaeda's ideology have proliferated in the Middle East and Africa. Some of these groups have pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri, and others have not. Even among the groups that have formal alliances with Al Qaeda, there is significant variation over the extent to which they are operationally integrated with Al Qaeda's senior leadership in practice. Some of these groups, despite the formal alliances, emerged in the context of local conflicts and are self-sustaining. In a 2014 interview, Zawahiri appeared to acknowledge a degree of decentralization, stating that "Al Qaeda is a message before it is an organization."¹ President Obama in a speech at West Point in May 2014 stated, "Today's principal threat no longer comes from a centralized Al Qaeda leadership. Instead, it comes from decentralized Al Qaeda affiliates and extremists, many with agendas focused in the countries where they operate." While the groups discussed in this report focus the majority of their attacks on local targets, they have been identified by U.S. officials as posing a credible threat to the United States or its allies, or to U.S. interests in the Middle East and Africa.

The rise and rapid expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has reignited a debate over the type and scope of policies and legislation needed to provide the tools to fully address the threats posed by such groups. In addition, the ongoing debates within Al Qaeda itself—over leadership and tactics—may prompt a reexamination of previous understandings of the group, and the ways in which it may have evolved since the September 11 attacks. This report will provide an overview of select groups, and address the debates and evolution

ongoing within Al Qaeda that may change the nature of the problem U.S. policymakers will be confronting. Additionally, it will discuss the tools Congress uses to address this problem, and the debates over policies and legislation.

Scope and Sourcing Note: This report focuses on Al Qaeda affiliates, or groups that have publicly sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda leadership and been formally accepted as affiliates. This includes Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Nusrah Front, and Al Shabaab. This report also profiles a selection of other groups that are not Al Qaeda affiliates but may have organizational links or ideological similarities with Al Qaeda or its affiliates and pose a credible threat to the United States or to U.S. interests in their areas of operation (see **Appendix**). These include the following:

- The Islamic State (formerly known as ISIL or ISIS). A successor to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which targeted U.S.-led forces. Al Qaeda leadership in February 2014 disavowed the group in response to its brutal tactics, infighting with other Sunni groups, and a long-running dispute over limits to its areas of operation.
- Al Murabitoun. The group publicly swore allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2014, and U.S. officials have described it as the greatest threat to U.S. interests in the Sahel. Al Qaeda's leadership to date has not publicly accepted Al Murabitoun as an affiliate.
- Groups sometimes referred to as "affiliates of affiliates," such as Boko Haram, Ansar al Sharia, and Ansar Bayt al Maqdis. These groups are reported by some sources to have some operational ties to Al Qaeda affiliates, and Ansar al Sharia has staged attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in the region.

This report draws from a variety of open sources, most of which CRS is not able to verify independently.

Al Qaeda: Background and Ideology

In 1988, Osama bin Laden formally established Al Qaeda from a network of veterans of the Afghan insurgency against the Soviet Union. The group conducted a series of terrorist attacks against U.S. and allied targets, including the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2000

attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* docked in Aden, Yemen. After the attacks of September 11, the United States redoubled its counterterrorism (CT) efforts, forcing the group's leadership to flee Afghanistan—where they had been hosted by the Taliban—and seek refuge in the tribal belt of northwest Pakistan. U.S. forces in 2013 located and killed Bin Laden in Pakistan, and Bin Laden's deputy Ayman al Zawahiri assumed leadership of the group. U.S. intelligence officials have argued in open testimony to Congress that persistent CT operations against Al Qaeda since 2001 have significantly degraded the group's ability to launch another major attack in the United States.

Al Qaeda's ideological agenda, which is shared in varying degrees by its affiliates and other groups, focuses on the expulsion of foreign forces and influences from traditionally or predominantly Islamic societies and the eventual creation of an Islamic state ruled by a system of Islamic law (*sharia*). To achieve these goals, Al Qaeda reportedly calls upon its members to pursue a range of measures, including

- *Salafist² Islamic reform.* The group advocates for the enforcement of a strict interpretation of *sharia*, although Al Qaeda leadership has differed on how quickly *sharia* should be imposed on populations under the group's control or that of its affiliates.
- *Defensive jihad.* Adherents are called to pursue armed resistance to counter what Al Qaeda describes as Western aggression. They are instructed to fight Western encroachment, such as the presence of U.S. troops in the Arabian Peninsula or in other areas they consider to be Muslim lands.³
- *Attacks on the "far enemy."* The organization largely achieved its notoriety for the series of fatal attacks it planned and implemented against symbolic targets, including the September 11 attacks in the United States and subsequent attacks in London, Madrid, and Istanbul. It justifies these attacks as part of its effort to eradicate foreign influences.
- *Removal of apostate regimes.* Al Qaeda calls for the removal of governments not based on its interpretation of *sharia* law because it views such governments as empowering human rulers and man-made legal systems over divine law. Al Qaeda leaders have described democratic principles as un-Islamic and tantamount to apostasy, which is punishable by death. They have also called for the overthrow of regimes they judge to be insufficiently Islamic, such as the Saudi monarchy.

- *Economic warfare.* Bin Laden and Zawahiri urged followers to attack economic targets to weaken both the West and local regimes. In particular, they called on supporters to conduct attacks on oil infrastructure in the region to deny the West access to the region's oil resources.
- *Attacks on non-Sunni Muslim religious groups.* Al Qaeda considers Shia Muslims to be apostates, and some leaders have encouraged attacks against local Shia populations. Other Al Qaeda leaders argue that such attacks should not be a priority as they can alienate the broader Muslim population. Al Qaeda leaders also regularly espouse anti-Israeli rhetoric, although there have been few, if any, operational missions against Israel.⁴

In their advocacy and recruitment efforts, Al Qaeda leaders have expressed support for and appealed to non-Arab Muslims—particularly those engaged in conflicts in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, and the Philippines—emphasizing that Muslims constitute one global nation or *ummah*.

Rise of Affiliate Groups

Al Qaeda began as a hierarchical movement but began to decentralize after the American-led invasion of Afghanistan overthrew the Taliban, eliminating Al Qaeda's sanctuary in that country.⁵ Affiliate groups, many of which had existed in some form prior to 9/11 but without formal ties to other groups, gradually began to formally align with Al Qaeda. Despite these alliances, most affiliates continued to focus primarily on local grievances and did not adopt Al Qaeda's call for global jihad against the West as an immediate priority. While Bin Laden in 2004 referred to the confrontation between the U.S. and its allies on one side and jihadist movements on the other as a "Third World War," open source data indicates that affiliate groups to date have remained focused primarily on local disputes. AQAP, which has attempted at least two failed attacks on U.S. soil, is a possible exception—although the overwhelming majority of its attacks target Yemeni military and security forces.

Analysts disagree on the level of threat posed to the United States by affiliate groups relative to the remnants of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Administration has drawn a sharp distinction between groups that actively seek to target the United States and those that it believes are

focused on local attacks and/or lack the capability to launch a major strike on U.S. soil. At the same time, some observers contend that Al Qaeda, its affiliates, and like-minded actors are growing in strength and influence; they argue that these diverse groups—if considered as a single entity—control more territory in the Middle East and Africa than at any previous time.⁶ Local affiliates could eventually grow to pose a threat comparable to that of Al Qaeda senior leadership, some argue. Even groups that start out with local aims may see themselves as part of an international struggle and expand their areas of operation once resources permit—as was the case with Somalia-based al Shabaab, which in 2013 attacked the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya.⁷

Another point of debate is the amount of control that Al Qaeda leadership is able to exercise over affiliate groups. At a press conference following the 2011 Abbottabad raid that killed Bin Laden, a U.S. intelligence official noted that initial analyses of recovered documents “clearly show that Bin Laden remained an active leader in Al Qaeda, providing strategic, operational and tactical instructions to the group.”⁸ However, researchers at the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point used internal Al Qaeda documents released after the raid to assert that the organization’s leadership was internally divided over how to deal with its affiliate groups and frustrated at its inability to control some local fighters.⁹ Researchers studied the limited documents declassified following the raid—including letters and other communications from Bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders—and noted that, “far from being in control of the operational side of regional jihadi groups, the tone in several letters authored by Bin Laden makes it clear that he was struggling to exercise even a minimal influence over them.”¹⁰

A separate set of documents recovered by the *Associated Press* in Mali suggest that just as Al Qaeda’s leadership may struggle to control its affiliate groups, those affiliates, in turn, may struggle to control their own members. In one document, AQIM’s governing board censures a local commander for his refusal to follow directives.¹¹ The fighter in question later split from AQIM to form Al Murabitoun. In the same set of documents, AQIM leaders also claim that there is distance between themselves and Al Qaeda leaders, noting that AQIM had received little communication from Bin Laden and Zawahiri since formally becoming an affiliate in 2006. However, some observers who argue that Al Qaeda is expanding geographically contend that the ability of Al Qaeda leaders to assert command and control is irrelevant if affiliate groups are committed to the same objectives.¹²

Despite the tension captured in internal communications between Al Qaeda leadership and some affiliate groups, leaders on both sides generally

have maintained a public display of unity, possibly calculating that this strengthens the image of both parties. However, the apparent unity of objectives does not appear to be matched by a similarity of capabilities, and thus different counterterrorism policies and programs might be more effective than one standard approach. Policymakers may also calibrate responses to various groups based on the extent to which they see the affiliates as integrated versus independent.

Regional Context

Some affiliates have refined their tactics as a result of Al Qaeda's experience in past conflicts—including against the United States—which may give them an advantage over other, newer groups that lack access to similar institutional knowledge.

- *U.S. CT policy.* Effective counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda's leadership have made it difficult for those leaders to travel and communicate. Their need to avoid detection may have hindered their ability to closely manage groups or enforce directives. The U.S. factor thus presumably prompted affiliates to become more self-reliant—even groups that may have preferred greater direction and guidance from Al Qaeda's senior leadership.
- *Experience.* Some leaders of affiliates and ideologically similar groups—including those of AQAP, the Islamic State, and the Nusra Front—were able to draw from their experiences fighting U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to help inform their tactics as they expanded into new geographic areas.
- *Organization.* The training, discipline, and structure provided by Al Qaeda affiliated groups may have increased the appeal of these groups relative to newer—and often more disorganized—armed groups. In Syria, for example, a new recruit described the Al Qaeda affiliated Nusra Front as “professional,” and said he decided to join them—rather than other armed groups—after observing their skill in planning operations.¹³

U.S. Government Terminology

The Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF, P.L. 107-40) enacted by Congress in September 2001 is the primary law authorizing U.S. operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. U.S. administrations later established categories of Al Qaeda-linked groups, each of which carries potentially distinct legal and policy implications. The terms below do not appear in the original AUMF text; rather, they have been delineated in a series of subsequent legal rulings and executive branch strategy papers.

- **Associated Forces:** organized, armed groups that have entered the fight alongside Al Qaeda or the Taliban, and are co-belligerents with Al Qaeda or the Taliban in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.¹⁴ Once established as co-belligerents, associated forces are considered legal targets of U.S. military force per the laws of armed conflict—which are commonly interpreted to permit a country at war to use force against those fighting alongside its enemy.
- **Affiliates:** groups that have aligned with Al Qaeda. This includes associated forces as well as groups and individuals against whom the Obama Administration considers the United States is not authorized to use force based on the authorities granted by the AUMF.¹⁵ The United States may use force against affiliates that have been further classified as associated forces.
- **Adherents:** individuals who form collaborative relationships with Al Qaeda or act on its behalf or in furtherance of its goals—including by engaging in violence—regardless of whether such violence is directed at the United States.¹⁶
- **Al Qaeda “Inspired”:** Groups or individuals not affiliated with identified terror organizations but inspired by the Al Qaeda narrative.¹⁷

U.S. officials occasionally use these terms interchangeably, with some mixing the category of Al Qaeda affiliates—groups that have publicly sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda leadership and been formally accepted as affiliates—with the category of groups considered “affiliates” under the AUMF—groups aligned with Al Qaeda against which the United States is not authorized to use force.¹⁸ The United States to date has not publicly categorized most individual groups into one of the above designations, nor has it identified consistent criteria by which to do so. A Pentagon spokesperson in mid-2013 stated that a

list identifying which groups the Administration viewed as associated forces should remain classified, arguing that its release would damage national security by bolstering the groups' credibility.¹⁹ Department of Defense General Counsel Stephen Preston in a May 2014 hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations stated that he could not speak publicly about which groups the Administration had determined it could target under the AUMF.

Establishing Criteria for “Associated Forces”

In a 2008 court case, the Bush Administration argued that a group should be considered an “associated force” if 1) it was part of a supporting force associated with Al Qaeda or the Taliban and 2) that supporting force was engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners. The court noted that, under this definition, a group's connection to Al Qaeda or the Taliban would need to be “considerably closer than the relationship suggested by the usual meaning of the word ‘associated,’” a standard that the court found the government unable to meet in that case. The Obama Administration in a 2009 brief declined to define “associated forces,” stating that the definition would require further development through its “application to concrete facts in individual cases.” In habeas cases to date, the term “associated forces” has generally covered only armed groups assisting the Taliban or Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. However, the Obama Administration has suggested that it may apply the term to groups based in other countries, and testimony by the Defense Department's General Counsel in May 2014 referred to AQAP as “part of, or at least an associated force of, Al Qaeda.”²⁰ For more information on the AUMF, see CRS Report R42143, *Wartime Detention Provisions in Recent Defense Authorization Legislation*, by Jennifer K. Elsea and Michael John Garcia.

A broader category is that of “like-minded groups” that may or may not be operationally linked with Al Qaeda, but potentially share at least some of its traits—particularly its salafi-jihadist ideological orientation. Salafi-jihadist groups advocate a return to what they consider the pure principles of early Islam, and support the use of force to achieve the application of those principles. Al Qaeda affiliates are salafi-jihadist groups who have sworn *bay'at* (allegiance) to Al Qaeda's leadership, and have in return been formally

accepted as affiliates. However, most salafijihadist groups are not part of Al Qaeda. On occasion, they may cooperate with Al Qaeda, its affiliates, or individuals belonging to these groups. Various salafi-jihadist groups hold a wide range of differing beliefs on issues such as the nature of an Islamic emirate and whether or to what extent to attack non-Muslims and Shi'a.²¹

“Affiliates” as a Framework for U.S. Policy

U.S. discussions of violent armed religious extremist groups in the Middle East and Africa have often focused on whether groups have sufficient ties to Al Qaeda to be considered formal affiliates. However, with the proliferation of local armed groups that share aspects of Al Qaeda's ideology, a group that fails to meet the formal threshold for “affiliate” status can nevertheless pose an active threat to U.S. interests. In some cases, there may be few meaningful differences between operations conducted by affiliates and those conducted by non-affiliates. Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia, for instance, allegedly attacked U.S. diplomats and infrastructure in Tunis in 2012. Ansar al Sharia in Libya and other groups reportedly were involved in the 2012 attack on the U.S. facilities in Benghazi that killed the U.S. Ambassador and killed or wounded other government personnel. Neither group is considered by the U.S. government to be a formal Al Qaeda affiliate, although each has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization. The Islamic State, which has seized significant territory in Iraq and Syria, was disavowed by Al Qaeda's leadership, undermining its previous status as an affiliate. Acknowledging that the term “affiliates” no longer covers all the major groups of concern, intelligence officials increasingly reference “like-minded” groups in threat assessments regarding Al Qaeda.²²

The policy focus on the affiliate label is partially a legal one, since the executive branch has interpreted the AUMF to authorize force against associated forces but not against all affiliates. Some groups—such as the Nusra Front—initially sought to portray themselves as opposition groups rather than Al Qaeda affiliates,²³ prompting questions as to whether groups could legalistically avoid the AUMF framework by foregoing a public declaration of allegiance to the group.²⁴ However, it is unclear whether groups that hide their affiliation with Al Qaeda are doing so primarily to sidestep U.S. targeting efforts or simply because they think such an approach will broaden their appeal within local communities. In addition, a group's public statements are likely only one of several factors that contribute to the broader assessment

by the executive branch of whether or not it considers a group to be an Al Qaeda affiliate. The Department of State designated the Nusra Front as an alias for Al Qaeda in Iraq in late 2012,²⁵ even though Nusra Front leader Muhammad al-Jawlani did not publicly pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda until April 2013.²⁶

Jihadist Debates over Al Qaeda's Future

As affiliate groups expand and conduct operations independently of Al Qaeda's leadership, affiliates, Al Qaeda leaders and other members of the international jihadist community are engaged in an ongoing debate over competing visions for the organizations' future.

Internal Al Qaeda documents from the Abbottabad raid suggest an internal debate among senior leaders over the group's relationship with affiliates. As noted by researchers at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, captured correspondence between Al Qaeda leaders show that some urged the group to "declare their distance, and even to dissociate themselves, from groups whose leaders do not consult with Al Qaeda yet still act in its name."²⁷ Others argued that the group should embrace affiliates as critical to the organization's growth. Bin Laden argued for maintaining communication with affiliates to "urge restraint and provide advice" but resisted incorporating groups he viewed as excessively violent or undisciplined, whose tactics could turn Muslim public opinion away from the group.²⁸ Zawahiri echoed this concern in a 2014 interview, stating that it was better to have ten responsible followers than "scores of thousands making the *ummah* hate them, their deeds, and their behaviors."²⁹ Taken together, these communications appear to show a group torn between highlighting its strength and geographical scope and maintaining control over its brand.

Zawahiri also appears to be struggling to recapture the legitimacy and popularity among Al Qaeda members and other salafi jihadists enjoyed by Bin Laden. Observers argue that he lacks Bin's Laden's charisma and that the new generation of jihadists may not fully recognize his authority.³⁰ While Bin Laden at times also struggled to rein in some affiliates, Zawahiri has faced a higher level of public defiance, as evidenced by the routine disregard reportedly given to directives he has issued to avoid infighting and collateral damage.³¹ In 2013 Zawahiri reportedly ordered ISIL to return to Iraq and refrain from conducting operations in Syria. ISIL leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi

refused to adhere to Zawahiri's directive, which he publicly denounced as a "command opposing Almighty God's command."³²

Some observers, including both AQ watchers and members of the international jihadist community, have suggested that Baghdadi—not Zawahiri—may be best positioned to fill the leadership vacuum left after Bin Laden's death.³³ Others have identified Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Nasir Wuhayshi as the most prominent Al Qaeda leader with the best chance of unifying jihadist groups.³⁴ Still others look to ideological figures such as Jordan-based Abu Mohammed Al Maqdisi, who regularly engages in debates about the future of the international salafi-jihadist cause, but refrains from direct involvement in terrorist operations or affiliation with individual groups.

Zawahiri has sought to minimize the significance of ongoing leadership disputes by emphasizing that the core of Al Qaeda lies in its message rather than in its organizational structure.³⁵ However, the internal Al Qaeda correspondence recovered in Mali and Pakistan suggests an expectation among Al Qaeda leaders that regional groups would defer to their directives.

Comparing the Aspirations of Various Affiliates

According to U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism officials, the threat posed by Al Qaeda affiliates to the United States varies widely across groups. AQAP has launched at least two failed attacks on U.S. soil, and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in early 2014 described it as the affiliate posing the most immediate threat to the U.S. homeland.³⁶ Clapper also stated that the Nusra Front has aspirations to launch an attack against the United States.³⁷ Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in a 2014 audio statement warned the United States of an impending "direct conflict,"³⁸ and U.S. officials interviewed by the *New York Times* expressed concern that Al Qaeda affiliates or like-minded groups in Syria could recruit individuals capable of traveling to the United States to conduct attacks.³⁹

Other Al Qaeda affiliates are seen by intelligence officials primarily as a potential danger to U.S. interests abroad, rather than direct threats to the U.S. homeland. U.S. officials have described Al Shabaab and Al Murabitoun as the greatest threats to U.S. interests in East Africa and the Sahel, respectively.⁴⁰ AQIM and Boko Haram also have been described as primarily regional threats. However, while these groups to date have conducted only local or regional attacks, most have stated aspirations of attacking the West. In

addition, the majority of these groups also seek to destabilize countries that the United States considers key to regional security; to disrupt regional commerce; or to conduct sectarian attacks that could be widely destabilizing.

The capabilities of affiliates and other groups hinge on a number of factors, some external to the groups themselves. Attacks by Somali affiliate Al Shabaab have been confined to East Africa, but U.S. officials have expressed concern about the group's efforts to recruit in the United States and other Western countries and its call for lone wolf attacks in the United States.⁴¹ In some cases, the operational ability of a group is magnified by the absence of capable forces to restrain it; the threat posed by Boko Haram, for example, is in part a function of the weakness of the Nigerian security forces.

SUB-REGIONAL PROFILES OF AL QAEDA INVOLVEMENT

The Levant and Iraq

Origins and Evolution of Al Qaeda Affiliate(s)

Iraq and Syria are home to one Al Qaeda affiliate—Al Nusra—and to the Islamic State, a group with shared roots that has sought to position itself as a global rival to Al Qaeda. The ideological and organizational roots of the Nusra Front and the Islamic State lie in the forces built by the late Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq in the aftermath of the ouster of Saddam Hussein. In 2004 Zarqawi formally merged his group Tawhid wal Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad) with Al Qaeda to form Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers (also known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQ-I). Following Zarqawi's death in a U.S. airstrike in 2006, AQ-I leaders repackaged the group as a coalition known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, presently emir of the Islamic State, assumed leadership of ISI in 2010 and rebuilt its capabilities while reasserting the group's independence from Al Qaeda's senior leadership.

In late 2011, the Nusra Front emerged in Syria, rising to prominence through high profile attacks on Syrian government military and leadership targets. Nusra distinguished itself from other armed groups not only with the lethality and efficiency of its operations, but with its religiously inspired rhetoric and objectives. ISI leader Baghdadi stated that he had dispatched Nusra's leaders to Syria to serve as ISI's vanguard in the struggle against the Asad government.⁴² The State Department in late 2012 amended its designation of AQ-I to include the Nusra Front as an alias for the group.⁴³ The designation noted that AQ-I emir Abu Du'a—an alias for Baghdadi—

controlled both AQI and Nusra, stating that “Abu Du’a also issues strategic guidance to al-Nusra’s emir, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, and tasked him to begin operations in Syria.”

By early 2013, ISI was conducting dozens of deadly attacks a month inside Iraq, largely ceding operations in Syria to the Nusra Front under Jawlani’s command. During this period, the Nusra Front did not publicly acknowledge its ties to ISI or Al Qaeda. In April 2013, Baghdadi announced his intent to merge his forces in Iraq and Syria with those of the Syria-based Nusra Front, to form the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Nusra Front and Al Qaeda leaders publicly rejected the merger and Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri ordered ISIL to confine its activities to Iraq, which Baghdadi refused. Under Baghdad’s leadership, ISIL continued a wave of attacks across northern, western, and central Iraq, while in Syria the group consolidated control over the city and province of Raqqa and expanded its presence in northwestern areas then controlled by other rebel forces.

In January 2014, clashes erupted between ISIL and other armed groups in northern Syria, as groups began to resist what they viewed as ISIL’s severe tactics and attempts to dominate other groups. Nusra leaders sought to mediate between ISIL and other secular and Islamist oppositionists, but later became embroiled in outright conflict with ISIL. Meanwhile, ISIL forces in Iraq seized parts of Ramadi and Fallujah, although the government was able to recapture much of Ramadi. In February 2014 Zawahiri formally severed ties with ISIL, stating that Al Qaeda was not responsible for ISIL’s actions. On June 29, 2014, ISIL declared the establishment of an Islamic caliphate extending from Aleppo province in Syria to Diyala province in Iraq and changed its name to the Islamic State (IS).⁴⁴

Political and Regional Context

Many experts attribute the 2014 uprising in Iraq and subsequent IS gains to unresolved differences among the country’s major communities, particularly its Sunni and Shiite Arabs. Iraq’s Sunni Arabs accused then-Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki, who led a large coalition of mostly Shiite political leaders, of abrogating a 2010 agreement to share power with Sunni leaders and of concentrating power in his and his faction’s hands.⁴⁵ According to this view, Maliki’s centralization of power provided “political space” for long-standing violent Sunni elements led by the Islamic State to reassert themselves after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.

The Islamic State’s advances also exposed weaknesses in the 800,000-person Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), which have operated since 2012 without

direct U.S. military participation. President Obama and other U.S. officials reportedly attributed the ISF collapse largely to the failure of Iraqi leaders, particularly Maliki, to build an inclusive government that could hold the allegiance of Sunni citizens or Sunni ISF personnel.

Nusra and IS operations in Syria appeared to benefit from the security vacuum created by Syria's civil war. Syrian armed forces, which have focused on defending major urban centers in the country's western half, withdrew from large swaths of the countryside in Syria's northeast, enabling opposition groups to establish a foothold in the area. Nusra's ability to operate in Syria was also seemingly facilitated by its reputation among Syrians as one of the most capable armed groups in the country, with the potential to bring about the fall of the Asad government. The group was seen by many as disciplined and professional and was reputed to treat the population relatively well, in contrast to other armed groups. Nusra also has a ready supply of weapons, funding, and technical expertise, which led other groups to turn to Nusra for assistance even if they did not share its ideology.

Interaction with Local Actors

In its 2014 offensive in Iraq, the Islamic State reportedly has been either joined, supported, or enabled by Sunni tribal fighters, former members of the late Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and military, and other Sunni residents.⁴⁶ This includes elements from the "Sons of Iraq"—Sunni tribal militias formed to combat AQ-I during the U.S. intervention in Iraq—as well as members of the Naqshabandi Order, known by its Arabic acronym "JRTN." Their enabling of the offensive, despite reservations among many Sunnis about the Islamic State's brutal tactics against opponents and its intention to impose a harsh version of Islamic law, appears to reflect broad Sunni dissatisfaction with the then-Maliki government.⁴⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on June 18, 2014, that "ISIL is almost undistinguishable from the other groups" currently fighting the Maliki government.⁴⁸ It remains to be seen whether new Prime Minister Haydar al-Abbadi, who also hails from Maliki's Shiite Da'wa Party, will be able to forge a more durable relationship with Iraqi Sunnis.

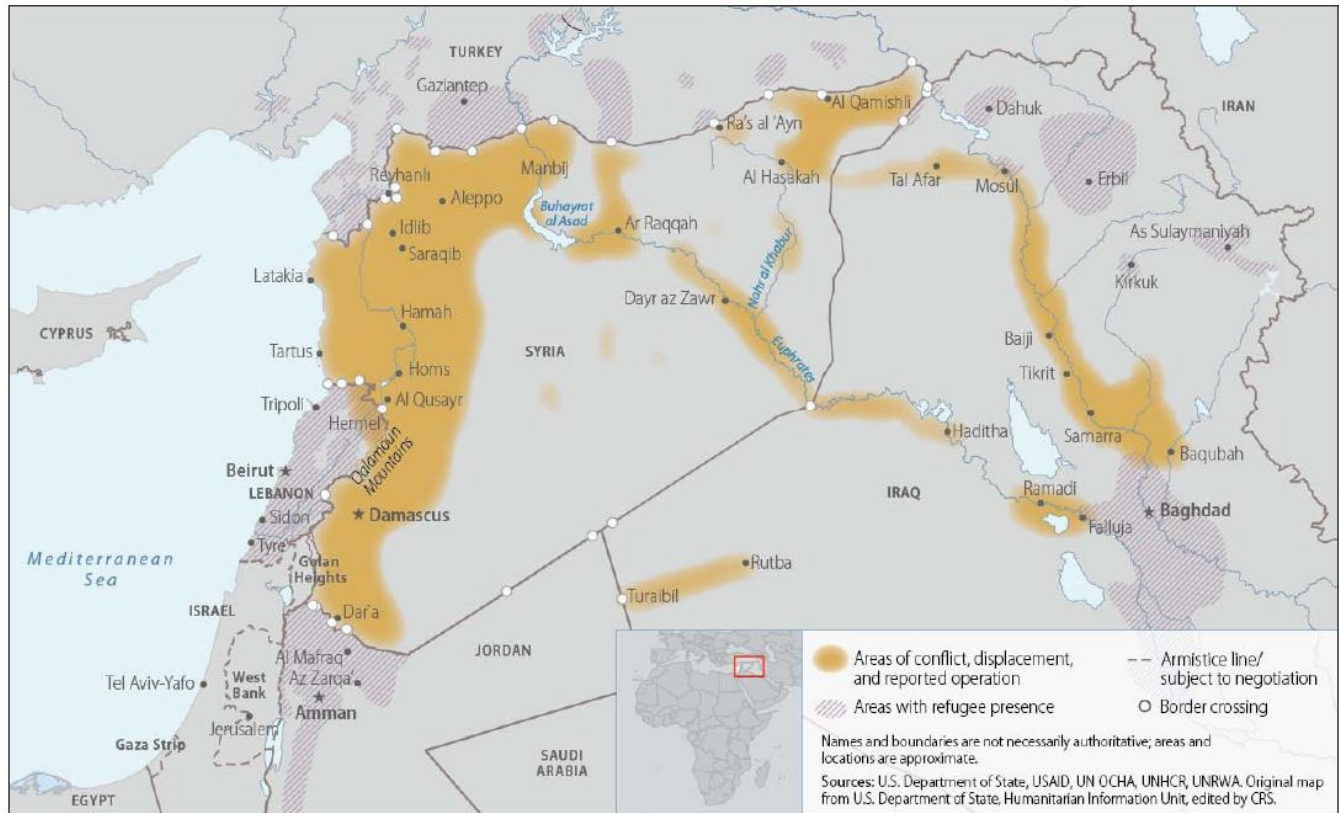


Figure 1. Areas of conflict and/or Islamic State and Nusra Front Operations.

In Syria, the Islamic State was able to co-opt some tribesmen in Syria's northeast, but many of its gains reportedly resulted when local and tribal rebel forces surrendered to the group and withdrew from their positions, seeking to avoid a forcible IS takeover.⁴⁹ In contrast, the Nusra Front has shown a willingness to collaborate with a broad range of armed groups in Syria, and has participated in military operations alongside non-Islamist fighters in spite of their ideological differences. In a December 2013 interview, Nusra Front leader Jawlani spoke about avoiding the mistakes of other hardline jihadist groups and about the value of collaborating with other rebel forces as part of a comprehensive military, political, and social strategy.⁵⁰

Yemen and the Horn of Africa

Yemen

Origins and Evolution of Al Qaeda "Affiliate(s)"

In the late 1980s, after U.S.- and Saudi-supported Afghan rebels ended Soviet occupation of their country, Arab volunteers who fought alongside the Afghan *mujahidin* (Islamist fighters) returned to Yemen and were subsequently embraced by the government and treated as heroes by many Yemenis. Some veterans of the Afghan war were integrated into the military and security forces or were used during the civil war of 1994 to fight against southern secessionists.

Perhaps because the Yemeni government successfully co-opted some Islamist hardliners and employed them to reinforce regime rule, and because Al Qaeda was building a capacity to conduct global terrorist operations, Yemen was not a major theater of Al Qaeda operations in the 1990s. However, Al Qaeda's attack against the *USS Cole* in 2000, coupled with the attacks of September 11, 2001, made Yemen a front in the U.S. confrontation with Al Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks, the Yemeni government became more forthcoming in its cooperation with the U.S. campaign to suppress Al Qaeda. Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh embraced the idea of a "war on terror," presumably at least partly to draw the United States closer to Yemen and receive as much intelligence and military support as possible in order to thwart threats to his position and preserve Yemen's political stability.

Despite their acceptance of U.S. counterterrorism support, Yemeni authorities were sensitive to possible public backlash against perceptions of close U.S.-Yemeni military cooperation. At times, Yemen was accused of

playing a “double game,” with former President Saleh periodically easing pressure on Al Qaeda and its sympathizers inside the country as part of his delicate balancing of competing domestic and international interests.⁵¹ In 2006, 23 of Yemen’s most wanted terrorists escaped a Public Security Organization (PSO) prison, in what many analysts believe was an inside job from within a Yemeni intelligence organization notorious for employing former “Arab Afghan” volunteers and other jihadists.⁵²

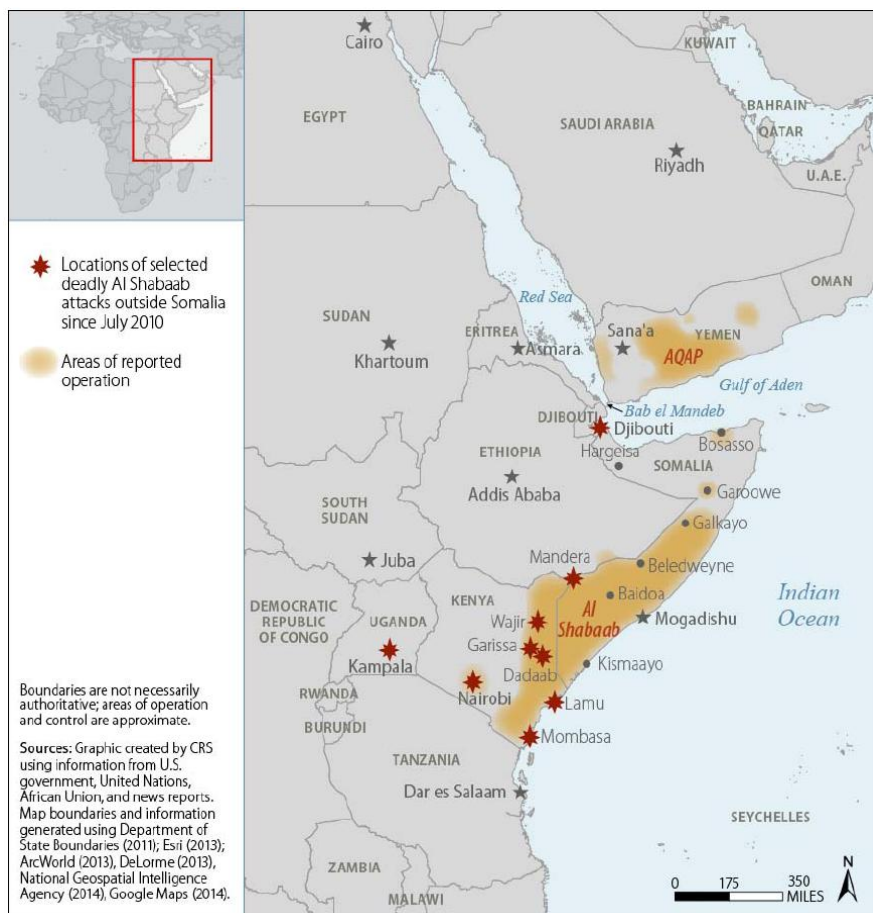


Figure 2. Al Qaeda in Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

Some of these escapees would eventually form a Yemeni affiliate of Al Qaeda, called, “The Al Qaeda Organization in the Southern Arabian Peninsula,” though most observers simply referred to it as Al Qaeda in Yemen.

In January 2009, Al Qaeda-affiliated militants based in Yemen announced that Saudi militants had pledged allegiance to their leader and that the group would now operate under the banner of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). A previous Saudi Arabia-based version of AQAP was largely dismantled and destroyed by Saudi security forces after a long and costly counterterrorism campaign from 2003 through 2007. Some Saudi militants fled to Yemen to avoid death or capture, helping to lay the groundwork for a reemergence of the organization there.

Political and Regional Context

AQAP is primarily based in some of Yemen's southern governorates where central government control is either weak or non-existent; tribal families rule; and hostilities against the central government run high due to historic government neglect and lack of development. In areas where oil is extracted, local tribes often claim that they rarely receive revenues generated from oil produced on their lands. In the south, economic and political grievances are both evident, making the region somewhat more receptive to an AQAP presence. According to the U.S. State Department, AQAP "retains a sanctuary" in the southern governorates of Abyan, Shabwah, Hadramawt, and in the cities of Rada` (in Al Bayda` governorate), Sana`a (the capital), Wadi Abidah (Ma`rib governorate), and Yatamah (Al Jawf governorate).

In addition, the State Department in October 2012 designated Ansar al Sharia (AAS), based in Yemen, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) due to its affiliation with AQAP. According to the U.S. State Department, "AAS represents a rebranding effort designed to attract potential followers in areas under AQAP's control."

Interaction with Local Actors

In some provinces, there are connections between some of Yemen's tribes and AQAP. Yemeni AQAP members tend to operate in their home provinces where they receive a certain level of protection from their host tribe. Protection is generally granted out of tribal custom. At times, the Yemeni government has attempted to co-opt local tribes to fight against AQAP, using tribal "Popular Committee" units.

Horn of Africa

Origins and Evolution of Al Qaeda “Affiliate(s)”

Al Qaeda operatives and other violent Islamist extremist groups have had a presence in East Africa for almost 20 years, although the extent of their operations there has varied over time.⁵³ Al Shabaab emerged in the early 2000s amid a proliferation of Islamist and clan-based militias that flourished in predominately Muslim Somalia in the absence of central government authority. In 2006, an alliance of local Islamic courts established control over Mogadishu with support from Al Shabaab. Loosely affiliated with local Islamic courts, Al Shabaab, unlike the clan militias, drew members from across clans, ascribing to a broader irredentist and religiously driven vision of uniting ethnic Somali-inhabited areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia under an Islamist caliphate.⁵⁴ Several of Al Shabaab’s leaders had reportedly trained and fought with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and known Al Qaeda operatives in the region were associated with the group in its formative years.

Al Shabaab grew in prominence in 2006, when hardliners within the Islamic courts called for jihad against neighboring Ethiopia. Ethiopia, reportedly supported by the United States, had backed a group of Mogadishu warlords, purportedly to capture suspected Al Qaeda operatives and counter the growing Islamist presence in the Somali capital. When Ethiopia intervened directly, deploying its own forces to Mogadishu in late 2006 to defeat the courts’ militias, Al Shabaab played upon historic anti-Ethiopian sentiment in the country to fuel an increasingly complex insurgency against the Ethiopian army and other regional forces deployed under the auspices of the African Union. Some analysts argue that Al Shabaab and other hardliners benefited directly from the U.S.-backed Ethiopian intervention that removed their rivals and gave credence to Al Shabaab’s anti-foreign rhetoric.

Political and Regional Context

The region’s porous borders, proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, weak law enforcement and judicial institutions, and pervasive corruption have combined with more than 20 years of state collapse in Somalia to provide an enabling environment for violent extremist groups. Somalia offered a permissive setting for Al Qaeda operatives like Harun Fazul and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, co-conspirators in the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, to train recruits. The country continues to be used as a training

site for groups like Al Shabaab, which U.S. officials currently consider to pose the most significant terrorist threat in the region.⁵⁵

U.S. air strikes in January 2007 against suspected Al Qaeda operatives fighting among the insurgents were incorporated into Al Shabaab's narrative that Islam in predominantly Muslim Somalia was under attack by the West and its proxy African "Crusader" forces. Countries contributing to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the United Nations have both been targets for the group, and Al Shabaab has launched multiple deadly attacks against U.N. facilities in Somalia. Al Shabaab has repeatedly used this narrative against Kenya, which launched its own military offensive against Al Shabaab in 2011 with the stated aim of defending itself against terrorist threats and incursions. In claiming responsibility for the September 2013 attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi, the group charged that the Kenyan military had "massacred" innocent civilians in southern Somalia during its operations.⁵⁶ It used a similar justification for its deadly July 2010 bombings in Kampala, Uganda.

Al Shabaab has also sought to position itself as a champion of Muslim grievances in the broader region, citing, for example, failure of French forces to prevent the massacre of Muslims in the Central African Republic as justification for a 2014 attack targeting French citizens in Djibouti (along with French support for Djiboutian participation in AMISOM). In claiming responsibility for June 2014 attacks on the Kenyan coast, Al Shabaab accused the Kenyan government of oppressing Muslims in the country and directing the extrajudicial killing of radical Muslim clerics.

Al Shabaab, which has long sought to discredit Somalia's fledgling central government, appears increasingly focused on sowing dissent and fomenting insurgency in Kenya. By some accounts, abuses committed by Kenyan security forces in the context of anti-terrorism operations have fueled existing grievances among some in the country's Muslim minority. Kenya, with its porous borders, and comparatively developed infrastructure and banking system, has been vulnerable to extremist transit and recruitment, and it provides easier access to high-profile Western targets than Somalia. While the death of Al Shabaab leader Ahmed Godane in September 2014 may pose challenges for the organization in the near-term, many regional experts argue that the growing extremist influence in Kenya will not be easy to contain.⁵⁷

Al Shabaab's network extends beyond East Africa—it has reportedly maintained ties with AQAP in nearby Yemen, among other AQ affiliates. In March 2014, AQAP's *Inspire* magazine featured a checklist of AMISOM troop-contributing countries, accompanied by a message from an Al Shabaab

spokesman, “Westgate was not a fight, it was a message. The real fight is on the way.” The group reiterated similar threats against regional targets in the aftermath of Godane’s death. Since 2011 AMISOM and allied Somali offensives have delivered notable military setbacks to Al Shabaab but the group continues to control territory in parts of southern and central Somalia. (See **Figure 2**). It continues to conduct attacks against a variety of government, civilian, and international targets, primarily in Somalia, but also in Kenya, and periodically, elsewhere in the region.

Interaction with Local Actors

In addition to maintaining relationships with some local clan leaders in parts of south-central Somalia, Al Shabaab has expanded its East Africa network in recent years. In January 2012, Al Shabaab announced its merger with a Kenyan group, the Muslim Youth Center, which subsequently changed its name to Al Hijra. In Kenya, Al Shabaab seeks to manipulate local political grievances and capitalize on the perceived marginalization of both Somali and non-Somali Muslim communities to build its fundraising and recruiting network, and to facilitate external attacks. Other Islamist extremist groups in East Africa are also alleged by some to have ties with Al Shabaab, including the Ansar Muslim Youth Center (AMYC) in Tanzania and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan group operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵⁸

North and West Africa

Origins and Evolution of Al Qaeda Affiliate(s)

Armed Islamist groups have proliferated in North and West Africa amid political upheaval in the Arab world, governance and security crises in Libya and Mali, and a growing Islamist insurgency in northern Nigeria. Many of these groups appear primarily focused on a domestic or regional agenda, but some groups also have targeted U.S. or other foreign interests in the region and some may aspire to more international aims. The United States has sought to empower regional partners to counter the threat of violent extremist groups, with mixed results. U.S. and French forces also have occasionally intervened directly against terrorist actors in the region, with recent U.S. operations focused on capturing terrorist suspects in Libya. U.S. officials now describe Libya as a terrorist safe haven and have warned about the threats posed by Libya-based extremists and flows of weaponry from Libya into surrounding

countries.⁵⁹ This region also remains a source of volunteers and recruits for Al Qaeda and other extremist groups outside the continent.

The region of North and West Africa is host to at least one Al Qaeda “affiliate”: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM. AQIM was formed when a former armed faction in Algeria’s 1990s civil conflict known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) declared allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2003, “united” with Al Qaeda in 2006, and renamed itself the following year.⁶⁰ The largest-scale AQIM attacks to date, a series of bombings targeting Algerian and international institutions, were carried out in 2007 and 2008 in Algiers and surrounding areas.

AQIM remains largely led by Algerian nationals. The group was long seen as internally divided between a more ideologically driven leadership based in northeastern Algeria, which focused on attacking Algerian state targets, and cells based in southern Algeria and the Sahel whose activities were more focused on raising funds through kidnap-for-ransom and transnational smuggling activities. (The Sahel region of West Africa refers to a vast stretch of sparsely populated terrain that cuts across Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad.) The Sahel-based commanders appeared to operate relatively independently of the group’s leadership, and at times even as rivals. At times, tensions also surfaced between AQIM’s predominantly Algerian senior leaders and fighters from Sahelian states who have called for a greater focus on carrying out attacks in West Africa.

These apparent divisions have erupted since 2011 as several of AQIM’s former Sahel-based commanders have founded new groups. Notably, former prominent AQIM figure Mokhtar bel Mokhtar founded a new group, Al Murabitoun, in 2013 after merging with another AQIM breakaway faction, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), led by Mauritanian and Malian nationals also previously associated with AQIM. Bel Mokhtar has since sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri, and the State Department now considers Al Murabitoun to be “the greatest near-term threat to U.S. and international interests in the Sahel.”⁶¹ The State Department continues to identify AQIM as the primary terrorist threat in Algeria. At the same time, AQIM has reportedly pursued ties to other violent extremist groups throughout the region, including groups operating in Libya, Tunisia, Mali, and Nigeria, which may involve coordinating operations and/or sharing training and personnel.⁶² In May 2014, AQIM carried out its first confirmed attack in Tunisia.

In 2012, a loose coalition of AQIM, MUJWA, and an allied Malian-led extremist group occupied most major population centers in northern Mali,

taking advantage of a domestic ethnic separatist insurgency and political crisis. AQIM reportedly used this expanded terrain to run training camps; pursue connections to other extremist organizations, including Nigeria's Boko Haram; bolster arms stocks; and recruit new fighters. French military operations in Mali, initiated in January 2013, have killed several AQIM commanders and disrupted logistical networks purportedly used by AQIM and AQIM-linked groups. Yet, these groups have not been eradicated. Some leaders have reportedly relocated in search of safe-havens and targets, while others continue to conduct sporadic attacks within Mali.

In North Africa, according to U.S. officials, operatives from several regional terrorist groups, including AQIM, the Mohammed Jamal Network, and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have used eastern Libya as a training, logistics, and transit hub since Qadhafi's ouster in 2011.⁶³ At least three groups calling themselves Ansar al Sharia ("defenders of the faith") are active in Tunisia and Libya, where they are reportedly carrying out a combination of terrorist and insurgent activity, local-level charity and proselytizing work, and facilitation of foreign fighter and weapons flows to Syria. Elements of these groups appear to be in contact with AQIM and with each other, and to coordinate certain activities, but the full extent and nature of their relationships remain unclear.

In recent months, amid the escalating contest for supremacy between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL), Al Murabitoun's Mokhtar bel Mokhtar has issued a pledge of allegiance to AQ leader Zawahiri, and AQIM has reiterated its allegiance to Al Qaeda core— while also calling for greater unity among global jihadists.⁶⁴ Observers have posited, however, that the question of whether to shift allegiance to the Islamic State is a matter of debate and contestation within these and other Islamist extremist groups in North and West Africa.⁶⁵ Boko Haram, for example, has issued recent statements expressing support for both the Islamic State's Baghdadi and for Zawahiri, as well as for Taliban leader Mullah Omar.⁶⁶

Political and Regional Context

In North Africa, violent extremist groups have exploited political uncertainty and tensions over national identity in the wake of domestic uprisings in Tunisia and Libya that toppled authoritarian regimes. Numerous reports suggest that southwestern Libya is a growing hub for regional terrorist actors. Political institutions in Algeria and Morocco have remained comparatively stable. The Algerian government has brought relative security to most of its national territory since the 1990s civil conflict with Islamist

groups. Still, terrorism remains a threat within the country, and Algerian leaders have expressed growing concern about security threats emanating from neighboring states, especially Libya. Morocco has not been the target of a large-scale terrorist attack since Al Qaeda-linked suicide bombings in Casablanca in 2003, but Moroccan authorities regularly claim to have broken up terrorist cells within the country, including some from AQIM. Occasional small-scale attacks in Morocco have been blamed on small, isolated cells adhering to salafist- jihadist ideology. According to numerous media reports, individuals of Tunisian and Moroccan origin, including European nationals, constitute among the largest groups of “foreign fighters” in Syria.⁶⁷ Moroccan and Tunisian leaders have publicly expressed acute concerns that such fighters could return to perpetrate attacks in their countries of origin.

The countries of West Africa’s Sahel region are among the poorest in the world and face complex security challenges, including periodic ethnic conflict and separatism, banditry, transnational organized crime, and violent religious extremism. These countries also have a history of poor governance and military intervention in politics. The vast terrain of eastern Mauritania, northern Mali, and northern Niger, where AQIM appears to have been most active over time (see **Figure 3**), is home to several ethnic and social groups with cross-border ties and historic grievances against the central governments of those countries. While extremist ideology does not appear to have been embraced by most Sahel residents, it likely resonates with certain marginalized populations, as do the financial resources wielded by AQIM and potentially other groups. AQIM and linked groups have also proven highly opportunistic in exploiting security gaps.

Particular conditions have given rise to the terrorist and insurgent group Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, which is responsible for a far higher level of deadly violence than any other Islamist organization in the region.⁶⁸ Key factors include a legacy of overlapping intercommunal, Muslim-Christian, and north-south tensions within Nigeria and popular frustration with elite corruption and other state abuses. The Nigerian security forces’ heavy-handed counterterrorism response in the northeast may be driving recruitment in some areas. The recruitment of Nigerian nationals by transnational terrorist groups other than Boko Haram also continues to be of concern to U.S. officials.

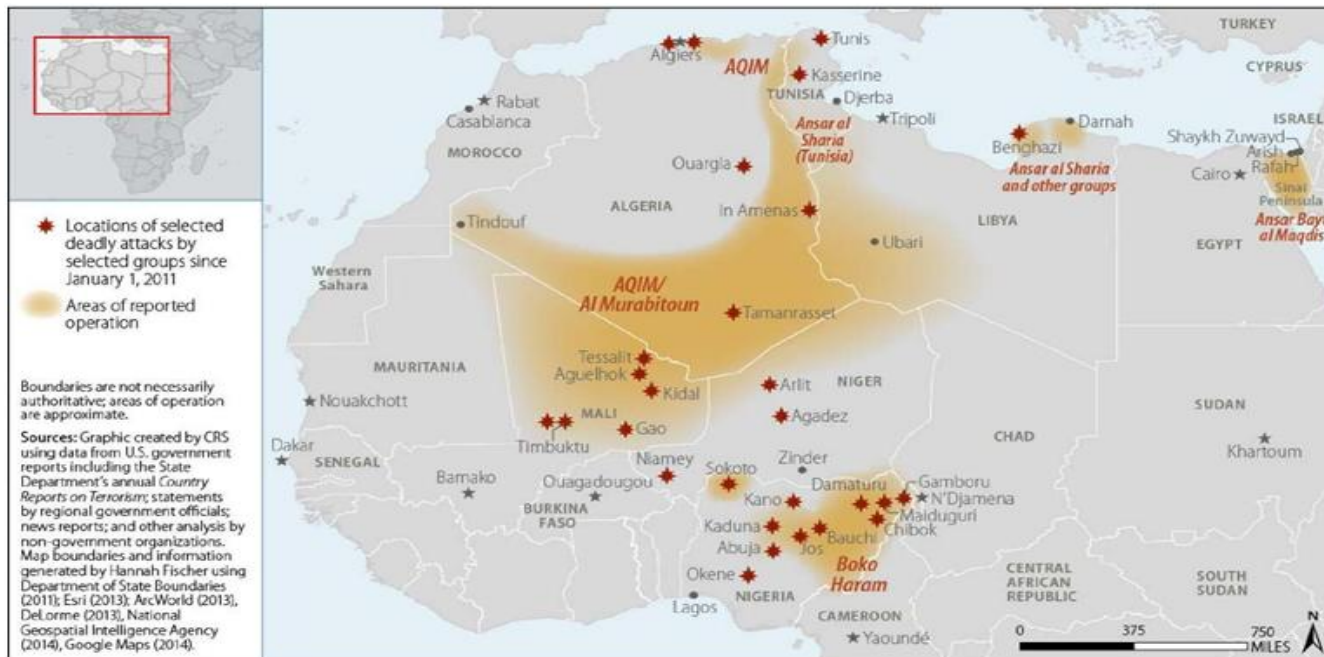


Figure 3. Al Qaeda in North and West Africa.

The State Department has identified various dynamics limiting the government's response to Boko Haram, including a lack of coordination and cooperation between Nigerian security agencies, corruption, misallocation of resources, limited requisite databases, the slow pace of the judicial system, and a lack of sufficient training for prosecutors and judges to implement anti-terrorism laws.⁶⁹ Both Boko Haram and a splinter faction known as Ansaru are reported to have cultivated close ties with AQIM.⁷⁰

Interaction with Local Actors

AQIM cells—including those that are now associated with Al Murabitoun—have established significant ties to local communities in northern Mali and potentially elsewhere in the Sahel. These ties have reportedly been cemented through cooperation in transnational smuggling activities, local recruitment, and intermarriage between key AQIM/Al Murabitoun figures and locally powerful families.⁷¹ AQIM and other extremist groups may be pursuing similar linkages in Libya. In Algeria, AQIM's leadership may benefit from longstanding mistrust between government actors and local Berber communities in the mountainous region of Kabylie, who, while not apparently sympathetic to AQIM's ideology, may be disinclined to cooperate with Algeria's national security forces. In Nigeria, Boko Haram appears to draw support predominately from an ethnic Kanuri base in the northeast, where the group is most active, although extremist operatives linked to both AQIM and Boko Haram appear intent on expanding the group's recruitment base, its operational reach, and the scope of its targets.⁷² The group's seizure of several towns in northeast Nigeria in mid-2014 and declaration of an Islamic caliphate mark a new phase in Boko Haram's evolution, although it is unclear whether its territorial expansion will correlate to an expanded fighting force or to a change in its relationship with other extremist groups in the region.

SELECT POLICY DEBATES

Competing Views of the Al Qaeda Threat

Policymakers, while agreeing that jihadist violence represents a significant threat to the United States, continue to debate the level of threat posed specifically by elements directly under the control of Al Qaeda's senior leadership in comparison to other groups. Those who view Al Qaeda as

weakened generally reference the decline of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and treat affiliates largely as a separate threat. Those who view Al Qaeda as growing in strength tend to focus on the rise of Al Qaeda affiliate groups, which they view in conjunction with Al Qaeda senior leadership as a single global network.

Al Qaeda Weakened

In a 2013 speech on counterterrorism policy, President Obama described Al Qaeda's senior leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan as being "on the path to defeat."⁷³ He discussed the rise of Al Qaeda affiliates, characterizing them as lethal but "less capable" than the central organization that planned the 9/11 attacks. He also discussed a third category of armed militants, which he described as "simply collections of local militias or extremists interested in seizing territory," with primarily local objectives. Obama stated that U.S. efforts should not be viewed as a "boundless global war on terror" but rather as a discrete set of targeted efforts against specific extremist networks.

Administration officials have balked at the notion that attacks against U.S. interests abroad are necessarily directed by Al Qaeda. State Department officials have stated that the Libyan militant group Ansar al Sharia, reportedly responsible for the 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, is not considered an Al Qaeda affiliate by State Department and intelligence agencies, despite some reported links to AQIM. Others have questioned whether Americans are giving Al Qaeda "too much credit" by ascribing them ultimate responsibility for every attack.⁷⁴

Al Qaeda Expanding

Those who point to an expanding Al Qaeda note that the group—when Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Al Qaeda affiliates are considered in the aggregate—controls more territory now than at any previous point in its history. In early 2014, DNI James Clapper responded in the negative to a question on whether Al Qaeda was on the path to defeat, noting that the group was instead, "morphing and franchising itself."⁷⁵ Retired Marine Corps general James Mattis in late 2013 described predictions of Al Qaeda's demise as "premature" and "discredited."⁷⁶ He argued that the organization is resilient and has adapted to changes. Proponents of this view contend that there is an undue focus on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, even as Al Qaeda affiliates expand into Syria, Iraq, and North Africa. They argue that these groups, by virtue of their affiliation or ideological similarity with Al Qaeda, will inevitably pose a threat to the United States.⁷⁷ Moreover, some of these

observers argue that the fallout of the Arab Spring has vindicated Al Qaeda in places such as Egypt, where the military deposed an elected Islamist government—potentially giving credence to Al Qaeda’s assertion that real political change can only come through violent jihad.

The views discussed above are not necessarily binary or mutually exclusive, and some Al Qaeda watchers point out that the group may simply be evolving in ways whose effects are not yet known. While one could argue that Al Qaeda’s geographic presence appears to be spreading, another perspective could emphasize the fact that a number of Al Qaeda’s affiliates are the product of the consolidation and rebranding of preexisting militant groups already operating in the area. While these to some extent competing views pervade the U.S. public discourse on Al Qaeda, it is unclear whether or how these views are likely to shape significantly different proposals regarding counterterrorism, diplomatic, or military policies. In addition, local public opinion may affect Al Qaeda’s ability to operate in some communities over the long term.

AUMF Reform⁷⁸

U.S. strikes against Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria have prompted heightened attention to a longstanding debate over the scope of the AUMF, and whether it should be expanded, repealed, or restructured. Passed by the House and Senate three days after the September 11 attacks, the 2001 AUMF authorizes the President to

use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.

Since 2001, the AUMF has been used to authorize the detention of persons captured in Afghanistan and other locations for the “duration of the relevant conflict.”⁷⁹ The executive branch has also used the AUMF to justify NSA warrantless surveillance⁸⁰ and drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen—including strikes that have targeted American citizens.⁸¹

In August 2014 the U.S. began airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq, and in September these strikes were expanded to IS positions in Syria. Congress did not enact legislation specifically authorizing U.S. force against the Islamic State prior to U.S. airstrikes. Initially, the Obama Administration

cited the President's authority under Article II of the Constitution as the legal basis for U.S. operations against the Islamic State. However, in a congressional notification submitted on September 23, 2014, the Administration cited to both the 2001 AUMF and the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq (2002 Iraq AUMF; P.L. 107-243) as providing statutory authorization for at least some aspects of U.S. operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.⁸² Nonetheless, some have debated whether either AUMF could be construed to provide statutory authorization for U.S. military action against the Islamic State and other security threats.⁸³

The case of the Islamic State has highlighted the issue of whether the AUMF allows the U.S. to target groups with little to no connection to the 9/11 attacks, or with unclear links to Al Qaeda's senior leadership. Former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Michael Leiter in 2013 referred to the need for occasional "shoehorning" by U.S. intelligence officials and lawyers to apply the AUMF to groups or individuals that pose a "clear and imminent" threat to the U.S.⁸⁴ In early 2014, some executive branch officials, including in the intelligence community, argued that Al Qaeda's decision to publicly sever ties with the Islamic State—then known as ISIL—removed the group from the category of Al Qaeda associates that the United States could strike under the AUMF.⁸⁵ However, the Administration in September argued that AUMF covers the Islamic State because the group is a successor to the version of Al Qaeda responsible for the 9/11 attacks.⁸⁶

Administration legal advisors also have examined whether the AUMF can be determined to authorize the use of force against groups sometimes called "associates of associates" or "affiliates of affiliates," such as Ansar al Sharia in Libya, which was linked to the 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi that killed four Americans. The group has no acknowledged ties to Al Qaeda's senior leadership, but some Ansar al Sharia members reportedly have ties to affiliate group AQIM, raising the question of whether these individuals' ties are sufficient to implicate the entire group.⁸⁷ Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified in October 2013 that the AUMF does not authorize the use of force against the perpetrators of the Benghazi attacks.⁸⁸ However, the U.S. government previously has cited authorities provided under the AUMF to conduct capture or lethal operations against individuals that it determines are part of Al Qaeda, even when those individuals are members of groups that have not been publicly identified as associated forces, such as Al Shabaab.⁸⁹ The AUMF also has been cited to authorize the conduct of capture or lethal operations outside Afghanistan in Yemen, Somalia, and Libya.⁹⁰

Executive Branch Authorities and the Separation of War Powers

The executive branch has suggested that it believes the President is authorized to conduct extensive counterterrorism operations pursuant to his role as commander-in-chief under Article II of the Constitution. Article II has traditionally been interpreted by the executive branch as allowing the President to use the military for defense purposes absent a congressional declaration of war for specific purposes, although this interpretation—and the definition of “hostilities” that could arguably necessitate a congressional declaration—has been subject to significant debate.⁹¹

Statements by Administration officials over the past several years suggest that they may deem strikes against certain militants to be lawful under Article II independently from the AUMF.⁹² These officials assert that the President has authority under the U.S. Constitution to use military force as needed to defend the nation against armed attacks and “imminent” threats of armed attack, and that the inherent right of national self-defense is also recognized in international law.⁹³ Others have argued that many U.S. tools for combatting Al Qaeda depend on the continued existence of a congressionally recognized state of “armed conflict” with the group, and that this state of conflict triggers the applicability of the Laws of Armed Conflict on which many U.S. authorities—including the authority to detain—are based. Under this view, a postwar framework would significantly limit the government’s ability to target and detain Al Qaeda members. However, Administration lawyers have argued that the provisions they cite in both domestic and international law grant the President the authority to respond militarily to terrorist threats, even after the conclusion of armed conflict.⁹⁴

Prior to September 11, 2001, U.S. administrations targeted Al Qaeda under domestic and international law without invoking a state of armed conflict. Following Al Qaeda’s 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania which killed 224 people, the United States launched cruise missile strikes against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. In a letter to congressional leaders, President Clinton stated that the United States acted “in exercise of our inherent right of self-defense consistent with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.” He further noted that the strikes were a necessary response to the “imminent threat of further terrorist attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities” and that he had directed these actions “pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.”⁹⁵

Overlapping or Competing Interests

As the United States pursues its counterterrorism policies abroad, some have asked how a strong focus on counterterrorism affects other U.S. priorities, including the following:

- **Regional stability.** The United States places a high value on preserving the security and stability of key partners and shielding them from the effects of worsening violence. There is some debate over whether current U.S. counterterrorism efforts reduce or heighten threats to regional allies. The increasing U.S. profile in Jordan, for example, seeks to bolster the security of the Hashemite kingdom, but a large U.S. presence there could trigger unrest aimed at the King, who reportedly faces internal criticism for his close ties to the United States. U.S. support for its East African partners' military operations against Al Shabaab in Somalia appears to have contributed to the success of those campaigns, but Al Shabaab has struck back against troop-contributing countries using high profile terrorist attacks.
- **Building partner capacity.** Admiral William McRaven, head of U.S. Special Operations Command, in early 2014 described building partner capacities as one of the most effective tools for reducing the threat to the United States from extremist groups.⁹⁶ While acknowledging circumstances under which the United States would need to conduct direct action, he emphasized the importance of long-term engagement with partners that would enable them to manage threats within their own borders.⁹⁷ However, U.S. partners occasionally hold diverging interests that lead them to take measures at odds with U.S. counterterrorism, human rights, and other policies. The United States maintains cooperative security relationships with countries including Nigeria, Iraq, and Egypt, but local security forces occasionally employ heavy-handed tactics against domestic opponents. In addition, as events in Iraq suggested, security forces trained by the United States could potentially fold when confronted with jihadist groups, allowing those groups to acquire U.S. weapons and equipment.
- **Democracy promotion.** Successive U.S. administrations have supported the spread of representative government overseas, arguing that institutions built around popular sovereignty and consensus stand the best chance for preserving long-term stability and security. In

Syria, the Nusra Front and the Islamic State share U.S. opposition to the autocratic rule of Syrian President Bashar al Asad, although the groups hope to replace Asad with an Islamic state. While encouraging a transition away from Asad's rule, U.S. policymakers may consider whether efforts to bolster the opposition could strengthen terrorist groups or weaken Syrian state institutions, reducing their ability to counter extremist influences. U.S. reliance on regional partners viewed as internally repressive may also undermine U.S. messaging on promoting democratic norms.

- **Improving U.S. image in the region.** U.S. officials reportedly hope to bolster the United States' image in the Middle East and Africa, as part of a wider process to counter extremist messaging. However, U.S. messaging efforts at times appear to be undermined by counterterrorism operations that result in civilian deaths. In Yemen, U.S. drone strikes—while effective at targeting local Al Qaeda elements—arguably contribute to the ongoing radicalization of the Yemeni population, particularly when civilians are killed in U.S. attacks. One Yemeni activist claimed that many recruits did not join AQAP for ideological reasons but rather to avenge relatives killed in drone strikes.⁹⁸
- **Broad regional coverage.** U.S. focus on counterterrorism may limit the attention or resources devoted to tracking other global developments key to U.S. interests, such as gradual political or military shifts on the part of state actors—including Russia—that could alter the political landscape.

Long-Term Goals

Debate continues regarding the United States' long-term strategic goal vis-à-vis Al Qaeda, its affiliates, and similar groups. President Obama, in his May 2013 speech to the National Defense University, argued that United States should focus on those that directly threaten the United States:

We must define the nature and scope of this struggle, or else it will define us [...] Neither I, nor any President can promise the total defeat of terror [...] But what we can do—what we must do—is dismantle networks that pose a direct danger to us and make it less likely for new groups to gain a foothold.

Congress may seek to identify criteria that will better enable policymakers to determine when a group's capacity is sufficiently dismantled so no further direct U.S. action is required. They also may consider whether and how action could be taken against groups whose threat potential may not have directly manifested itself, and how to use military, economic, diplomatic, intelligence, and law enforcement resources in an optimally calibrated way to mitigate threats without harming other interests.

However, some Al Qaeda watchers argue that if U.S. policies to counter the group and its affiliates focus primarily on terrorist designs on U.S. targets, these policies may not be ideally configured to work against what these watchers consider to be the ultimate purpose for which Al Qaeda uses terrorism—to seize and govern territory in areas historically associated with Islam.⁹⁹ Continuing debate on this point could focus on the extent to which Al Qaeda groups' prospects and ambitions to rule threaten overall U.S. interests, and to what extent U.S. capabilities and public opinion can support operations to counter Al Qaeda's potentially broad, long-term, and likely non-negotiable aspirations.

Debates over how to best address threats from Al Qaeda and its affiliates also may consider the issue in the context of other U.S. domestic and foreign policy priorities competing for public attention and resources. To what extent has the nature and acuity of the threats these groups pose to the United States changed from the time of Al Qaeda's rise in the 1990s to now? How has the conflict with the Islamic State shaped U.S. counterterrorism policy? What other policy priorities have emerged, and how do these relate to priorities regarding Al Qaeda and efforts to counter terrorist threats against U.S. interests?

POSSIBLE TOOLS FOR CONGRESS

U.S. counterterrorism programs, often conducted in partnership with other countries, are administered by the Department of Defense, State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and others, including various law enforcement, financial, and intelligence agencies. Through the appropriations process, Members of Congress may condition agencies' use of funds, specify funding levels for specific programs, and stipulate how an agency's budget can be reprogrammed. Congress also oversees programs through its hearings, requests for audits, and the establishment of reporting requirements. By reviewing and endorsing nominees for key leadership posts,

Congress has an opportunity to consider the strategic outlooks and priorities of individuals placed in leadership positions in key counterterrorism, diplomatic, and military entities. In the ongoing debates surrounding counterterrorism policy, congressional input and participation can have an effect in several broad areas, including the following:

Military Force

Successive administrations since 2001 have adopted a broad interpretation of the AUMF and/or Article II of the Constitution to conduct a range of military and intelligence operations. As the United States continues to withdraw from Afghanistan—while at the same time initiating airstrikes against the Islamic State in Iraq—Members might propose legislation to constrain, repeal, or expand the AUMF to reflect a changing international environment. Members might also continue to shape the contours of the U.S. footprint and the parameters of direct intervention overseas by providing oversight and legislating on issues such as drone strikes and other special operations.¹⁰⁰

Building Partner Capacity

The Obama Administration has requested \$5 billion for the creation of a Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) to build the capacity of allied states to combat terrorism inside their own borders. Congress is considering the request as part of its broader consideration of the FY2015 request for Overseas Contingency Operations funding for the Departments of Defense and State.¹⁰¹ Several existing programs also support security assistance to international partners, including

- Section 1206 of the FY2006 NDAA (P.L. 109-163), as amended, which provides the Defense Department (DOD) with the authority to train and equip foreign military forces for counterterrorism and stability operations;¹⁰²
- Section 1208 of the FY2005 NDAA (P.L. 108-375), which authorizes DOD to fund “foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals” that support counterterrorism operations by U.S. Special Operations Forces;

- Section 1207 of the FY2012 NDAA (P.L. 112-181) which created the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF). This joint State-DOD fund is designed to provide security and counterterrorism assistance, including equipment, supplies, and training, to countries designated by the Secretary of State with the concurrence of the Secretary of Defense;
- International security assistance under Title IV of annual State and Foreign Operations appropriations bills, which provides funding for anti-terrorism programs, military training, and foreign military assistance.

Counter-Radicalization/Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs

Multiple U.S. agencies, including the State Department, USAID, and DOD, implement a range of programs designed to counter extremist recruitment overseas. These programs may target communities viewed as susceptible to radicalization by promoting moderate Muslim voices, expanding access to information, supporting alternative livelihoods, and otherwise promoting alternative narratives through public messaging. The United States also supports programs in some counterterrorism partner nations to promote de-radicalization in prisons.

Development Aid

Development aid, generally administered through USAID, is often seen as complementing U.S. military or security operations by enabling societies to reform, rebuild, and strengthen key social, political, and economic institutions and infrastructure that would mitigate terrorism or make its resurgence less likely. USAID also administers counter-radicalization programs in some Middle East and Africa countries. In many cases, the recipient countries face security challenges that make it difficult to deliver or implement aid. Corruption, mismanagement, and waste also can limit the effectiveness of aid in some situations.

Democracy Promotion

The Administration has emphasized the role of democratization in combatting terrorism, but has been viewed by some as prioritizing stability over representative government in parts of the Middle East and Africa. Through annual foreign operations and State Department appropriations legislation, Congress provides funding for democracy promotion in the Middle East and Africa through avenues including USAID, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Millennium Challenge Account, the Near East Regional Democracy fund, and the Foundation for the Future.

Terrorist Financing

Following the 9/11 attacks, Congress passed P.L. 107-56 (the USA PATRIOT Act) which expanded the ability of the Treasury Department to detect, track and prosecute those involved in money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2004, the 108th Congress adopted P.L. 108-458, which appropriated funds to combat financial crimes, made technical corrections to P.L. 107-56, and required the Treasury Department to report periodically on the current state of U.S. efforts to curtail the international financing of terrorism. Congress may consider additional issues such as regulation of alternative remittance systems in the United States, reducing overlap among federal agencies that cover this issue, and increasing cooperation with other nations to increase the implementation and enforcement of terrorist financing laws. However, affiliates and other extremist groups may still find ways to bypass restrictions or may finance their activities through other means.

Intelligence Collection and Gaps

Congress oversees the intelligence community (IC) through the select committees and has used legislation to direct and restrain IC activities related to counterterrorism, with implications for the Middle East and Africa.

Multilateral Engagement

The 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy discussed the need to leverage multilateral institutions to increase partner engagement, reduce financial burdens on the United States, and enhance the legitimacy of counterterrorism efforts. Most recently, the Administration has requested the participation of a broad coalition of countries as part of U.S. strategy to defeat the Islamic State. The United States has sought a range of support from international partners, including participation in an air campaign against IS forces, assistance to Iraqi government and Iraqi Kurdish forces, arming and training of moderate Syrian rebels, increased intelligence sharing, commitments to curb the flow of fighters and resources to the Islamic State, and the provision of financial support.

Other possible channels for multilateral cooperation include the following:

- Using the Counterterrorism Engagement fund (CTE) in the Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) account of annual State and Foreign Operations appropriations bills to focus specifically on counterterrorism aid and multilateral organizations. For example, CTE funds the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, whose Terrorism Prevention Branch provides counterterrorism assistance to U.N. member states.
- Working with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international body established by the G-7, and FATF-style regional bodies. The FATF develops global regulatory standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing, and FATF-style regional bodies bring regional governments together to better combat financial threats and monitor each other's compliance with international obligations.
- Working with regional multilateral bodies, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the African Union, which might provide resources and manpower for CT initiatives.

OUTLOOK

Al Qaeda and the ideological movement it has sought to lead are in a state of flux. The goals of Al Qaeda affiliates will probably remain diverse, encompassing a range of local, regional, and international aims—sometimes

within the same group. The ability of Al Qaeda's senior leadership to exert control over affiliates is likely to fluctuate, or, if current trends hold, possibly weaken further. However, ongoing dynamics are likely to include

- **Spillover.** Al Qaeda is likely to seek continued expansion, as shown by its support for combatant groups in Syria. Countries bordering ongoing civil conflicts are particularly vulnerable to a spillover Al Qaeda presence, although some of the offshoots established in these countries may initially assume financing or logistical support roles rather than directly seeking to destabilize the countries in which they are based.
- **Leadership Struggles.** Al Qaeda and the broader international salafist-jihadist movement also are likely to continue to struggle with internal divisions and legitimacy issues. Al Qaeda's center of gravity may continue to shift from Afghanistan and Pakistan to areas of Yemen or Syria, although the planned withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in late 2014 could relieve some pressure on the group's senior leadership. At the same time, Al Qaeda is likely to encounter ongoing competition from the Islamic State, which split from Al Qaeda earlier this year and later emerged as the group's most prominent rival.
- **Potential Threats to U.S. Interests.** It is unclear how current and future dynamics will affect the ability of Al Qaeda and similar groups to target the United States, U.S. allies, and U.S. regional interests. Some argue that divisions within the organization diminish its capacity to organize attacks against the United States. Others contend that these types of splits lead to greater violence as rival groups both inside and outside the Al Qaeda umbrella compete for financing and recruits by launching attacks against the West and its local allies.¹⁰³ The Islamic State's prominent emergence as a peer competitor to Al Qaeda is a case in point.

These considerations provide Members of Congress with opportunities for significant deliberation. Lessons learned from past counterterrorism efforts and the evolving threat picture might inform congressional views and engagement with the Administration and the U.S. public on these issues. The evolving struggle against jihadist terrorist threats has occupied a prominent place in national debate for more than a decade and has the potential to precipitate sudden emergencies and calls for immediate action.

Table 1. FTO and SDGT Designations

	Initial FTO and SDGT Designation	Designation last amended
GSPC / AQIM	March 2002 ^a (FTO), September 2001 ^b (SDGT)	February 2008
AQ-I / ISIL/Islamic State	December 2004 ^c	May 2014
Al Shabaab	February 2008	-
AQAP	January 2010	-
Nusra Front	December 2012 ^d	May 2014
Boko Haram and Ansaru	November 2013	-
Al Murabitoune	December 2013	-
Ansar al Sharia – Tunisia	January 2014	-
Ansar al Sharia – Libya	January 2014	-
Ansar Bayt al Maqdis	April 2014	

Source: State Department.

Notes: This chart reflects the initial dates in which groups were designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists. Some groups have adopted new names since the time of their initial designation, and this change has been reflected in later amendments. This chart does not include individuals, who have often been designated separately—and in some cases earlier—than their respective groups.

* FTOs are designated by the Secretary of State in accordance with the Immigration and Nationality Act. The legal criteria are the following: (1) it must be a foreign organization; (2) it must engage in terrorist activities, as statutorily defined, or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism; and (3) the organization's terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security of the United States.

* SDGT designations are made under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, which targets terrorists and those providing support to terrorists or acts of terrorism. As a result of the designation, all property subject to U.S. jurisdiction in which designated entities have any interest is blocked and U.S. persons are prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them or to their benefit.

^a The State Department designated AQIM's predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), as an FTO in 2002 and amended the designation in 2008 to AQIM.

^b Executive Order 13224, issued September 23, 2001 <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/122570.htm>.

^c The State Department designated the Islamic State's predecessor, AQ-I, as an FTO in December 2004. The designation was amended in May 2014 to make ISIL the group's primary name and to remove all aliases linked to the Nusra Front.

^d Nusra Front was designated in December 2012 as an alias of FTO group Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I). The designation was amended in May 2014 to list Nusra as a separate group independent of AQ-I and its successor groups ISIL and the Islamic State.

^e This designation also applies to Al Mulathamun Battalion, which the State Department describes as an alias of Al Murabitoun.

APPENDIX. GROUP PROFILES

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)¹⁰⁴

Overview. AQIM, which evolved from an Islamist insurgent faction in Algeria's 1990s civil conflict, was formed when the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) "united" with Al Qaeda in 2006 and renamed itself in 2007. AQIM has conducted bombings against Algerian state targets, attacks on security forces in Algeria and the Sahel region of West Africa, and kidnappings, including Westerners, across the region. It has also reportedly provided support to other Africa-based violent extremist groups. U.S. officials have assessed AQIM to be focused on local and Western targets in North and West Africa, potentially including U.S. interests and personnel in the region. The group has leveraged instability in North and West Africa since 2011 to expand the scope of its operations. At the same time, its capacities may have been degraded by French military operations since 2013. See also Al Murabitoun, below.



Source: AQIM social media.

Figure A-1. AQIM.

Leadership. AQIM's emir, Abdelmalik Droukdel, an Algerian national, is reportedly based in northeastern Algeria. Long-reported leadership disputes within AQIM have erupted since 2011, as several of AQIM's former Sahel-based commanders have joined or founded new groups.

Objectives. AQIM's rhetoric broadly focuses on achieving an Islamic caliphate in Algeria and throughout North Africa, and on countering Western influence, notably that of former colonial power France.

Areas of Operation. AQIM has claimed responsibility for attacks, kidnappings, and other activities in Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. AQIM has also pursued ties to groups in Tunisia and Libya, and elements of the group are reported to have moved to southwestern Libya since 2013.

- **Algeria.** AQIM claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in Algiers in 2007-08 targeting the prime minister's office, Constitutional Council, U.N. office in Algiers, and a police precinct, which killed dozens of people. Bombings and attacks on Algerian police and military institutions have continued outside Algiers, occasionally killing a dozen or more people at a time.
- **Mali.** AQIM has long had a presence in Mali, which has served as a hub for kidnap-for-ransom operations and other fundraising. AQIM asserted territorial control in parts of northern Mali in 2012, in coordination with two other Islamist extremist groups. France's military intervention in January 2013 restored nominal Malian state control and weakened—but did not eliminate—AQIM's presence. Recent attacks attributed to AQIM have targeted French, Malian, and U.N. forces.
- **Niger.** AQIM has conducted multiple kidnappings in Niger. Two French citizens kidnapped in the capital, Niamey, in 2011 were killed during a French rescue attempt.
- **Mauritania.** Between 2005 and 2009, AQIM carried out multiple attacks on Mauritanian security forces and foreign nationals in Mauritania. In 2008, AQIM used small arms to attack the Israeli Embassy in the capital, Nouakchott. No fatalities were reported.

Attacks against U.S. interests. AQIM claimed responsibility for the 2009 murder in Mauritania of American citizen Christopher Leggett, who was conducting missionary work. According to the State Department, AQIM was linked to the Benghazi attacks on September 11, 2012. AQIM has publicly urged its supporters to attack U.S. embassies and kill U.S. ambassadors.

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. According to the State Department, as of 2013 AQIM had under a thousand fighters in Algeria and a “smaller number” in the Sahel. Sources of funding include kidnap-for-ransom, involvement in regional smuggling operations, local “taxation” and extortion, and possibly aid from supporters in Europe. In 2012, U.S. officials described AQIM as the “best funded” Al Qaeda affiliate.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. “Union” with Al Qaeda was announced by Al Qaeda’s then-deputy leader Ayman al Zawahiri in 2006. The Obama Administration considers AQIM an Al Qaeda “affiliate.”¹⁰⁵ In July 2014, the group publicly reiterated its pledge of allegiance to Zawahiri; however, news reports suggest that the group’s members may be torn over whether to switch allegiance to the Islamic State.

Al Shabaab

Overview. Al Shabaab (aka *Harakat Shabaab al Mujahidin*, or Mujahidin Youth Movement) is an insurgent and terrorist group that evolved out of a militant wing of Somalia’s Council of Islamic Courts in the mid-2000s. In its formative years, Al Shabaab drew on historic anti-Ethiopian sentiment among Somalis for recruits and support, including among the Somali diaspora in the United States and Europe. The group held significant territory in south-central Somalia, including the capital, Mogadishu, in the late 2000s, until the U.N.-authorized African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM) gained momentum against the insurgency through a series of military offensives in 2011-2012. Al Shabaab continues to wage an asymmetric campaign against government, AMISOM, and international targets in Somalia, and thousands of civilians have been killed in its attacks. While Al Shabaab has primarily focused on its agenda in Somalia, it has threatened the countries contributing troops to AMISOM and has successfully conducted deadly terrorist attacks in Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda.

The group’s ability to recruit abroad and the presence of foreign fighters, among them U.S. citizens, in Somalia have been of significant concern to U.S. policymakers. Some foreign fighters have reportedly deserted in recent years, either out of disillusion with military losses or because of internal dissent. Reports suggest some may have left for other jihadist theaters, while others, including recruits from Kenya, may be trained in Somalia and then deployed to conduct attacks against targets elsewhere in East Africa.



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-2. Al Shabaab.

Leadership. Al Shabaab's emir, Ahmed Abdi Godane (aka Ahmed Abdi aw-Mohamed, Abu Zubeyr), was killed in a U.S. airstrike on August 31, 2014. His predecessor, Aden Hashi Ayro, was killed in a 2008 U.S. missile strike. The group had suffered infighting within its senior ranks in recent years, and Godane, who reportedly aspired to pose a global threat, had consolidated power by neutralizing his rivals within the movement in 2012-2013. In announcing his successor, Ahmed Umar (aka Abu Ubaidah), who is viewed as a close Godane ally, Al Shabaab reaffirmed its allegiance to AQ leader Zawahiri.

Objectives. Al Shabaab broadly ascribes to an irredentist and religiously driven vision of uniting ethnic Somali-inhabited areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia under an Islamist caliphate. Its leaders have also repeatedly expressed their commitment to the global jihad movement. The group has justified its attacks outside Somalia as retaliation for participation in, or support for, AMISOM and/or as retribution for alleged abuses against Muslims in Somalia and the broader region.¹⁰⁶

Areas of Operation. Al Shabaab attacks have been primarily concentrated in Somalia, although it has increasingly claimed responsibility for attacks in Kenya since 2011, and has demonstrated its ability to strike targets in Uganda and Djibouti as well. Security offensives against Al Shabaab in 2011-2012 pushed Al Shabaab out of Mogadishu and other major southern

cities and ports, but it continues to control territory and run training sites in parts of south-central Somalia. Al Shabaab reportedly maintains cells and/or relationships with affiliated groups in Kenya, Tanzania, and other countries in the region.

Attacks against U.S. interests. Al Shabaab leaders have issued repeated threats against U.S. and Western targets in Somalia and beyond, and have called for strikes against the United States. Two Sudanese citizens who were involved in the January 2008 murder of a U.S. diplomat in Sudan are believed to be among Al Shabaab's ranks.¹⁰⁷ The group's July 2010 bombings in Kampala, Uganda, killed more than 70 people, including one American. While no Americans were killed in the September 2013 assault on the upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, that and subsequent attacks have underscored the serious threat to Western citizens in the country. In confirming the death of Godane in a U.S. strike, Obama Administration officials cited his oversight of "plots targeting Westerners, including U.S. persons in East Africa" and suggested that the strike was conducted in response to an "imminent threat" to U.S. interests in the region.¹⁰⁸

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The State Department estimates Al Shabaab to have several thousand members, including a few hundred foreign fighters. Allied clan militias may augment Al Shabaab's strength in some areas of south-central Somalia. Reports of increased recruitment in Kenya in recent years are also of concern. While Al Shabaab's loss of Mogadishu and other strategic port cities deprived the group of valuable revenue sources, reports suggest it continues to tax charcoal production, despite a U.N. embargo on the Somali charcoal trade, and exports from smaller ports still under its control. Foreign donations also contribute to its financing; the United States and others have sought to sanction several Kenyan clerics, for example, who are alleged to raise funds and recruit for the group.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. The Obama Administration characterizes Al Shabaab as Al Qaeda's largest affiliate in Africa and considers elements of the group to be associated with Al Qaeda in the context of the AUMF.¹⁰⁹ Some of Al Shabaab's founding members fought with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and senior Al Qaeda operatives in East Africa, including Fazul Mohammed, mastermind of the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, have been associated with the group. After multiple public expressions of allegiance by Al Shabaab to Al Qaeda, the two entities announced their formal alliance in February 2012. The practical effect of the merger is unclear—Al Shabaab appears to operate largely independently. It maintains ties with other AQ affiliates, most notably AQAP in nearby Yemen.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)¹¹⁰

Overview. AQAP is a Sunni Muslim terrorist organization led by Saudi and Yemeni nationals who are determined to overthrow their respective “apostate” governments and who target the United States for its history of support to the Saudi royal family. AQAP is based primarily in the remote southern provinces of Yemen that largely spurn control by Yemen’s central government. There, the group has concentrated its efforts at sowing an insurgency against the central government in Sana’a. Generally described as one of the most dangerous Al Qaeda affiliates to U.S. interests, AQAP has repeatedly attempted to attack the United States and has been one of the first Al Qaeda offshoots to publish its propaganda in English in order to attract Americans and other Westerners to its cause. Since AQAP was formed through a merger of Saudi and Yemeni Al Qaeda-aligned terrorists in 2009, AQAP has targeted the U.S. Embassy in Sana’a and the Saudi royal family, and has made at least two unsuccessful attempts to bomb airlines over U.S. air space (Christmas Day 2009, Parcel bombs October 2010).



Source: AQAP social media.

Figure A-3. AQAP.

Leadership. The leader of AQAP is a former secretary of Osama bin Laden’s named Nasir al Wuhayshi, who became the leader of AQAP’s Yemeni predecessor in 2007, a year after escaping from prison, along with 23 other wanted militants. Al Wuhayshi’s personal connection to Bin Laden reportedly enhanced his legitimacy among his followers. After Bin Laden was killed in 2011, Wuhayshi pledged AQAP’s allegiance to Bin Laden’s successor, Ayman al Zawahiri. In 2013, Zawahiri reportedly ordered Wuhayshi to carry out large scale terrorist attacks against the United States. In

response, Wuhayshi apparently vowed to carry out an attack that would “change the face of history,” leading the U.S. State Department to take immediate precautionary measures. These included issuing a worldwide travel alert and suspending diplomatic operations in 19 Muslim countries, including Yemen. In March 2014, AQAP released a video showing Wuhayshi addressing a large, open-air gathering of followers.

Objectives. AQAP actively seeks to attack U.S. territory and American interests abroad. In the third edition of its online magazine (entitled *Inspire*), AQAP claims that its long-term strategy is to launch many small-scale attacks against the United States. The group also apparently seeks to assassinate members of the Saudi royal family, as was illustrated by a failed assassination attempt in August 2009 against former Assistant Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, the director of the kingdom’s counterterrorism campaign. Finally, AQAP also apparently seeks to build an anti-government insurgency in southern Yemen that would ultimately be capable of holding territory.

Areas of Operation. Although AQAP has a presence throughout Yemen, it is most active in the southern provinces that were formerly part of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (also known as South Yemen), and which united with their northern counterparts in 1990. Despite unification, political and economic power remains in the hands of northern leaders and tribes, and AQAP has benefitted from southern resentment directed against the government. In the spring of 2014, the Yemeni armed forces launched a major offensive against AQAP, and President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi remarked that “Army and security forces have to be prepared for cleansing operations in Abyan, Maarib, Shabwa and Bayda.”¹¹¹

Attacks against U.S. interests. AQAP has attempted on several occasions to bomb U.S. commercial aircraft and indoctrinate what the intelligence community refers to as “homegrown violent extremists” or HVEs. Its most high-profile attempted attack to date was the failed bomb attack against Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009. Before 2009, militants in Yemen targeted Western embassies in Sana’a, foreign oil companies and their facilities, and tourists. Two attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Sana’a in 2008 killed 17 people, including one U.S. citizen, and injured dozens of Yemenis. In October 2010, AQAP, through its U.S.-designated terrorist bombmaker, Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri, again attempted to attack the United States—in this case using explosives hidden inside parcel packages addressed to fictitious people in Chicago associated with Jewish synagogues.

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. According to the U.S. State Department, “AQAP’s funding primarily comes from robberies and kidnap for ransom operations and to a lesser degree from donations from like-minded supporters.”

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. The leader of AQAP has the closest ties to the original leadership of Al Qaeda as it existed in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban. In 2013, the current leader of Al Qaeda’s global network, Ayman al Zawahiri, reportedly promoted Nasir al Wuhayshi to what U.S. officials have described as the new “general manager” of the AQ global terror network, making him the second most important man in the organization.¹¹² Multiple news services revealed that U.S. intelligence services intercepted a phone call in late July 2013 between Zawahiri and Wuhayshi, in which (as mentioned above) the former urged the latter to carry out large scale terrorist attacks against the United States.

AQAP operates both within the Arabian Peninsula and internationally. Some analysts also suggest that, with the encouragement of Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the group is expanding its ties with Al Shabaab in Somalia, though such ties, to the extent they exist, may be more material than operational; Yemeni and Somali officials claim that they are providing each other with arms and manpower to help counter both organizations.¹¹³ Many observers believe that for the time being, AQAP will refrain from formally switching its allegiance from Al Qaeda to the Islamic State; however, AQAP propagandists have touted IS gains in Iraq and encouraged their followers to join the Islamic State in battle.¹¹⁴

Nusra Front

Overview. A Salafi-jihadist militia, Jabhat al Nusra li Ahl al Sham (the “Support Front for the People of Syria,” known as Jabhat al Nusra or the Nusra Front) emerged in Syria in late 2011 and claimed responsibility for a series of high profile suicide bombing attacks against government security forces as well as summary executions of captured Asad regime soldiers.

Leadership. Nusra Front’s leader is known by his nom de guerre, Abu Muhammad al Jawlani, a name suggesting family origin in the Golan Heights. Jawlani is thought to have fought against Coalition forces in Iraq before returning to Syria after the start of the uprising in 2011 to establish an Al Qaeda franchise in the country. Initially backed by current Islamic State leader

Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the two leaders split when Baghdadi sought to absorb the Nusra Front under his command in April 2013.



Source: National Counterterrorism Center.

Figure A-4. Nusra Front.

Objectives. The group's ideology, messaging, and tactics mirror those of Al Qaeda affiliates in other regional conflict zones. Nusra Front members engage in organized relief work and service provision efforts to gain favor with civilians, and the group has cooperated with other secular and Islamist groups and engaged in conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, now known as the Islamic State). The prospect for clashes between the Nusra Front and its past partners remains, as the Front's own uncompromising views on the long-term implementation of Islamic religious law may create rifts with Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and religious minorities in Syria.

Areas of Operations. Independent analysts and social media suggest that Nusra Front operatives are active across Syria. In northern and eastern Syria, the group's clashes with the Islamic State have weakened Nusra's hold on some former areas, while Nusra's cooperative operations with other Syrian opposition elements appear to continue. In southern Syria, the Nusra Front remains engaged in campaigns to oust Asad forces from Dara'a province as well as areas of the Golan Heights adjacent to Israel.

Attacks against U.S. interests. The Nusra Front has not directly attacked the United States. However, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in early 2014 stated that the group "does have aspirations for attacks on the homeland."¹¹⁵ In September 2014, U.S. military forces launched strikes against the Syria-based "Khorasan Group," described by former CIA Deputy

Director Michael Morrell as the “external operations arm” of the Nusra Front.¹¹⁶ According to Rear Admiral John Kirby, the strikes “were undertaken to disrupt imminent attack plotting against the United States and western targets.”¹¹⁷

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. Unofficial estimates suggest that the Nusra Front may have as many as 6,000 fighters operating across Syria.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. Nusra Front leaders have sided with Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri in the rift between Zawahiri and Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. In September 2014, the Associated Press reported that unnamed U.S. officials had described attempts by “Khorasan Group” members to collaborate with Al Qaeda-affiliated bomb makers in Yemen and Syria-based Western foreign fighters to place explosives aboard commercial aircraft.¹¹⁸ Attorney General Eric Holder acknowledged that enhanced aviation security measures imposed earlier this year were a response to “Khorasan Group” activities.

The Islamic State (IS, formerly known as ISIL or ISIS)

Overview. The Islamic State is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that has expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria since 2013, threatening the security of both countries. Its forerunner is Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I), which was formed by militant leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to combat the U.S. military presence in Iraq. In 2013, the group adopted the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) name as it expanded its operations into the Syria conflict. The group’s brutal tactics and clashes with other anti-Asad groups in Syria contributed to the February 3, 2014, Al Qaeda leadership statement disavowing any connection with ISIL. In June 2014 the group declared the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and changed its name to the Islamic State.

Leadership. The leader of the Islamic State is Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al Badri al Samarra’i, who operates under the name Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. He is also known as Abu Du’a. An Iraqi national who rose through the ranks of AQ-I, Baghdadi reportedly was detained by U.S. forces in Iraq from 2005 to 2009.

Objectives. U.S. officials have noted that the Islamic State’s goal is to “establish an Islamic caliphate through armed conflict with governments it considers apostate—including Syria, Iraq, and the United States.”¹¹⁹



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-5. The Islamic State.

Areas of Operation. The Islamic State operates in Syria's northeast, controlling large areas of Raqqah, Hasakah, and Dayr az Zawr provinces. The group also has a presence in northern Aleppo province. Within Iraq, the primary area of IS strength is the overwhelmingly Sunni-inhabited Anbar Province, although the group also operate in Nineveh and Diyala provinces.

Attacks Against U.S. Interests. In September 2014, National Counterterrorism Center Director Matthew Olsen stated that the Islamic State poses an "immediate and direct threat" to American personnel in Iraq. IS militants in August beheaded two American journalists captured in Syria. Olsen also stated that "we have no credible information that ISIL is planning to attack the U.S.," but he highlighted potential threats posed by foreign fighters with Western passports. According to Olsen, as many as 12,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Syria, including more than 1,000 Europeans, and more than 100 U.S. citizens.¹²⁰

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The CIA estimates that the Islamic State can "muster between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria," according to a reported statement by an agency spokesman.¹²¹ The Islamic State is thought to be largely self-financing, relying on oil sales and criminal and extortion networks. The group has seized a number of oil fields in Syria and Iraq, and members reportedly sell heavy and light crude oil from these fields to local merchants or traders who smuggle the oil across the border or in some cases sell it back to the Syrian government.¹²² In both Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State derives revenue by imposing taxes on local populations and demanding a percentage of the funds involved in humanitarian and commercial operations in areas under its control, including farms and local

businesses.¹²³ In addition, it has looted some bank branches, and demanded protection money from Christians and other minorities who wish to remain on land controlled by the Islamic State. The group also gains funds by collecting ransoms in exchange for releasing hostages, particularly from European countries. The Islamic State takes in as much as one million dollars per day from illicit oil sales, smuggling, and ransom payments, according to one senior intelligence official.¹²⁴

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri severed ties with the group in February 2014. Since then, IS leaders have stated their view that their group “is not and has never been an offshoot of Al Qaeda”⁴⁰ and that, given that they view themselves as a state and a sovereign political entity, they have given leaders of the Al Qaeda organization deference rather than pledges of obedience. Some media reports suggest possible competition between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda for prominence and support.¹²⁵

Boko Haram and Ansaru

Overview. Boko Haram, which emerged over a decade ago as a small Sunni Islamic sect advocating a strict interpretation and implementation of Islamic law for Nigeria, has grown since 2010 into one of the world’s deadliest terrorist groups. Calling itself *Jama’a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da’wa wa-al Jihad* (roughly translated from Arabic as “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad”), the group is more popularly known as Boko Haram (often translated as “Western education is forbidden”), a nickname given by local Hausa-speaking communities to describe the group’s view that Western education and culture have been corrupting influences that are *haram* (“forbidden”).¹²⁶

Boko Haram currently appears to pose a threat primarily to local stability in Nigeria and to state and international targets, including Western citizens, in the region.¹²⁷ Civilians in the impoverished, predominately Muslim northeast have borne the brunt of the violence. The group conducted its first lethal attack against Western interests on August 26, 2011, with the deadly bombing of the United Nations building in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja. There has been a dramatic increase in attacks in 2014, including multiple bombings in Abuja and the abduction of almost 300 girls from a school in the northeast town of Chibok. In mid-2014 the group began an effort to seize territory in the northeast Nigerian state of Borno.

A splinter faction, Ansaru (aka *Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis-Sudan*, or Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa), emerged in 2012. It was publicly critical of Boko Haram's killing of Muslim civilians and appeared focused on government and foreign targets. Several kidnappings attributed to the group resulted in the killing of foreign hostages. Ansaru has claimed no recent attacks, and the extent to which it currently operates independently from or cooperates with Boko Haram is unclear.



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-6. Boko Haram.

Leadership. Abubakar Shekau is Boko Haram's most visible leader. He succeeded the group's original leader, Mohammed Yusuf, who was killed in police custody after a July 2009 security crackdown.

Objectives. Boko Haram's leaders have publicly called for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity, and purportedly seek to establish an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria. To elicit recruits and sympathizers, the group draws on a narrative of resentment and vengeance against state abuses, and its attacks appear aimed at undermining the government's control over the northern part of the country.

Areas of Operation. Boko Haram attacks have been primarily concentrated in northeast Nigeria, but the group has claimed responsibility for attacks across north and central Nigeria. Several attacks in 2014, however, have reportedly extended as far south as Lagos. Security forces from neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have increasingly clashed with the group as it has crossed Nigeria's borders into northern Cameroon and the Lake Chad Basin area. The group has conducted kidnapping operations targeting European citizens in northern Cameroon since early 2013.

Attacks against U.S. interests. In public statements issued in July 2010, Boko Haram threatened to attack Western interests in Nigeria and expressed solidarity with Al Qaeda.¹²⁸ The group has made subsequent threats against the United States. To date, neither Boko Haram nor Ansaru have conducted a successful attack against an American target.

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The State Department estimates Boko Haram's membership to range from the hundreds to a few thousand. The group appears to fund its operations largely through criminal activity, including bank robberies, kidnappings, assassinations for hire, trafficking, and various types of extortion.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. The Obama Administration does not currently consider Boko Haram to be affiliated with Al Qaeda's central leadership, despite periodic rhetorical pledges of solidarity and support for Al Qaeda and its affiliates from Shekau.¹²⁹ Shekau has also expressed support for Islamic State leader Baghdadi, although such statements do not appear, to date, to indicate allegiance or practical affiliation. Reports suggest possible communications, funding, training, and weapons links between Boko Haram, Ansaru, AQIM, AQAP, and Al Shabaab.¹³⁰

Al Murabitoun¹³¹

Overview. Al Murabitoun was formed in 2013 through the merger of two AQIM splinter factions: the Al Mulathamun Battalion (the Masked Ones, also known as the Battalion of Those Who Sign in Blood) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA or MUJAO after its French acronym). These groups have carried out attacks in Algeria and the Sahel region of West Africa. The State Department has described Al Murabitoun as "the greatest near-term threat to U.S. and international interests in the Sahel," citing its "stated intent to attack Westerners and proven ability to organize complex attacks."

Leadership. Mokhtar bel Mokhtar, an Algerian national who was previously a Sahel-based commander for AQIM, founded Al Murabitoun after publicly splitting from AQIM in 2012. Founding leaders of MUJWA, which was created in 2011 by AQIM Sahel-based figures who expressed an intention to focus on West Africa, include Hamad el Khairy and Ahmed el Tilemsi.

Objectives. Bel Mokhtar has announced an intention to fight against Western interests, notably France.



Source: Reuters.

Figure A-7. Al Murabitoun leader Mokhtar bel Mokhtar.

Areas of Operation

- ***Algeria.*** Bel Mokhtar claimed responsibility for a January 2013 attack near the town of In Amenas, in southeastern Algeria, that involved seizing control of a natural gas facility. Over 800 people were taken hostage, and 39 civilians were killed, including three U.S. citizens. The four-day siege ended with an Algerian military assault against the compound. MUJWA's first known attack was the kidnapping of three humanitarian workers from the Western Sahara refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, in 2011.
- ***Niger.*** Before the merger of Al Mulathamun and MUJWA, the two groups in May 2013 claimed joint responsibility for twin suicide bombings in northern Niger against a Niger military base and a French uranium mine. At least 20 people, including the attackers, were killed.
- ***Mali.*** MUJWA asserted territorial control over parts of northern Mali in 2012, in coordination with AQIM and a third Islamist extremist group. MUJWA and Al Murabitoun members have been implicated in attacks against French forces in Mali.

Attacks against U.S. interests. As mentioned above, three U.S. citizens were killed in the In Amenas hostage-seizure attack in southeastern Algeria in January 2013; seven more escaped during the attack.

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The U.S. government has not released a detailed unclassified assessment of the group's size and capabilities. Mokhtar bel Mokhtar and other leaders in the group have long been associated

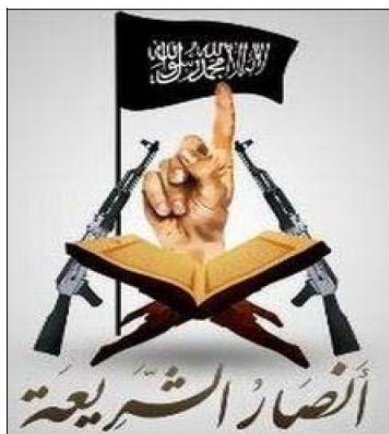
with kidnap-for-ransom, smuggling, and other criminal fundraising activities. Al Murabitun may also receive funding and other support from other extremist groups.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. Al Murabitoun is a splinter faction of AQIM, an Al Qaeda “affiliate.” In April 2014, Mokhtar bel Mokhtar swore allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri in the context of the split between Al Zawahiri and the Islamic State.

Ansar al Sharia - Libya

Overview. Formed in 2012, the Ansar al Sharia organizations in eastern Libya are made up of armed Sunni Islamists that support the imposition of Islamic law.

Leadership. Mohammed al Zahawi is the publicly identified leader of Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi (AAS-B). According to the State Department, former Guantanamo Bay detainee Sufian bin Qumu leads Ansar al Sharia in Darnah (AAS-D).



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-8. Ansar al Sharia – Benghazi.

Objectives. In a 2013 interview, a spokesman for AAS-B denied links to non-Libyan groups and said, “the group wants to establish a state that adopts the sharia revealed on Prophet Muhammad rather than the man-made laws that govern civilian states.”¹³² Ansar al Sharia groups in Libya conduct military

training, security patrols, outreach and education efforts, and public works projects in support of their objectives.

Areas of Operation. Libyan media and Ansar al Sharia social media accounts suggest that the organization's current operations extend to Benghazi, areas of eastern Libya, and Sirte. The group also has publicized efforts to deliver relief supplies in northern Syria and other countries.

Attacks against U.S. Interests. According to the State Department, the groups "have been involved in terrorist attacks against civilian targets, frequent assassinations, and attempted assassinations of security officials and political actors in eastern Libya, and the September 11, 2012, attacks against the U.S. Special Mission and Annex in Benghazi, Libya. Members of both organizations continue to pose a threat to U.S. interests in Libya."

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The U.S. government has not released a detailed unclassified assessment of the group's size and capabilities. Publicly available information suggests the group's membership may be in the high hundreds or low thousands of individuals, some of whom possess truck-mounted anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, military-style uniforms, and assault rifles. Some images suggest the group possesses man-portable air defense missiles (MANPADs).

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. The group has few to no established ties to Al Qaeda's leadership, but some Ansar al-Sharia members have ties to affiliate group AQIM.

Ansar al Sharia—Tunisia¹³³

Overview. Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia (AAS-T) was founded in 2011 by a former transnational jihadist who had been active in Afghanistan. AAS-T initially operated openly in Tunisia and appeared to be focusing on preaching and social works, while also reportedly facilitating flows of Tunisian combatants to Syria. Since 2012, the group has been implicated in several violent attacks within Tunisia. AAS-T shares a name with several other violent extremist groups in the Middle East and North Africa, but the extent of ties among these groups is uncertain.

Leadership. Saifallah Ben Hassine, aka Abou Iyadh, founded and appears to lead AAS-T.

Objectives. Seemingly, the establishment of an Islamic state in Tunisia.



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-9. Ansar al Sharia – Tunisia.

Areas of Operation. Attacks attributed by U.S. and Tunisian officials to AAS-T have all taken place within Tunisia—including assassinations of Tunisian political figures, attacks against Tunisian security forces, and attempted suicide bombings of tourist destinations. Recent non-government reports suggest that AAS-T’s leadership may have moved to Libya since 2013.

Attacks against U.S. interests. According to the State Department, AAS-T was “involved” in an attack against the U.S. Embassy and American school in Tunis on September 14, 2012. No Americans were killed.

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. The U.S. government has not released a detailed unclassified assessment of the group’s size and capabilities.

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates. AAS-T has not publicly sworn allegiance to the Al Qaeda organization, but the State Department characterizes the group as “ideologically aligned with al-Qa’ida and tied to its affiliates, including AQIM.” Both AAS-T’s spokesman and its leader have reportedly released messages expressing support for ISIL—now the Islamic State—in 2014.

Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (ABM)¹³⁴

Overview. ABM formed in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula following the collapse of former president Hosni Mubarak’s rule in 2011. It primarily conducts attacks against the Egyptian government, but has also apparently

killed Israelis in cross-border attacks, along with foreign tourists. U.S. government sources have not described the group as a part of Al Qaeda or an associated force, possibly due to the group's focus on Egyptian and Israeli targets.



Source: Open Source Center.

Figure A-10. Ansar Bayt al Maqdis.

Leadership. In May 2014, Egyptian security officials claimed to have killed the emir of ABM, Shadi el Menai. The group, however, refuted the claim, saying that el Menai was not killed and that he was also not the emir.¹³⁵ The scarcity of open source information on ABM makes assessments of its leadership difficult.

Objectives. According to its public rhetoric, ABM apparently aims to establish an Islamic caliphate and implement sharia law. The group has targeted Egypt's economy by attacking gas pipelines and the tourism industry.

Areas of Operation. ABM primarily operates in the Sinai Peninsula, but has conducted attacks in Cairo and over the border in Israel.

- **Sinai.** ABM's most prominent attacks in the peninsula include a suicide bombing targeting the South Sinai Security Directorate in October 2013, downing an Egyptian helicopter with a shoulder-fired missile in January 2014, and a tour bus bombing in February 2014.

- **Israel.** ABM has allegedly carried out or been involved in a number of cross-border attacks since August 2011. In August 2012, ABM reportedly attacked the southern Israeli city of Eilat with rockets.
- **Cairo.** ABM tried unsuccessfully to assassinate the Egyptian Interior Minister in September 2013.

Attacks against U.S. interests: ABM to date has not attacked U.S. personnel or facilities. After the June offensive made by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, now known as the Islamic State), however, ABM issued a warning that if the United States sends forces to repel ISIL, “the response will be harsh and we will respond strongly” to American citizens in Egypt.¹³⁶

Size, Financing, and Capabilities. There is little public information on ABM’s financing. Observers speculate that ABM leaders use existing smuggling networks in the Sinai for financing.¹³⁷

Relationship with Al Qaeda and AQ Affiliates

To date, ABM is not considered an Al Qaeda affiliate; however, there has reportedly been communication with Al Qaeda leadership. Al Zawahiri praised ABM’s attacks on Sinai gas pipelines in August 2011.¹³⁸ Additionally, ABM’s propaganda arm often embeds clips of Al Qaeda leaders in their videos.¹³⁹ It is unclear to what extent ABM is connected to other Al Qaeda affiliates or associated forces.

End Notes

¹ Ayman al Zawahiri interview with Al-Sahab Establishment for Media Production, entitled “Reality between pain and hope,” April 18, 2014.

² “Salafism” refers to a broad subset of Sunni revivalist movements that seek to purify contemporary Islamic religious practices and societies by encouraging the application of practices and views associated with the earliest days of the Islamic faith. The world’s Salafist movements hold a range of positions on political, social, and theological questions and include both politically quietist and violent extremist groups.

³ This is Bin Laden’s interpretation. Jihad literally means “striving” or “struggle” and can refer to either an internal or external struggle. Defensive jihad in traditional Islamic thought refers to the obligation of Muslims to defend one another from external attack.

⁴ “Zawahiri aims at Israel: behind al Qaeda’s pivot to the Levant,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, February 2, 2014.

- ⁵ Joseph Felter et al., *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities*, Combating Terrorism Center, p. 709.
- ⁶ "Al Qaeda controls more territory than ever in Middle East," *CNN*, January 7, 2014.
- ⁷ "The franchising of al Qaeda," *New York Times*, January 25, 2014.
- ⁸ "Background Briefing with Senior Intelligence Official at the Pentagon on Intelligence Aspects of the U.S. Operation Involving Osama Bin Laden," Department of Defense News Transcript, May 7, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4820>.
- ⁹ "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Laden Sidelined?" Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 3, 2012. https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CTC_LtrsFromAbbottabad_WEB_v2.pdf.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, p13.
- ¹¹ "Rise of Al Qaida Sahara terrorist," *Associated Press*, May 28, 2013.
- ¹² "Report: Obama admin never defined Al Qaeda," *Washington Free Beacon*, April 24, 2014.
- ¹³ "Syrian rebels tied to Al Qaeda play key role in war," *New York Times*, December 8, 2012.
- ¹⁴ Testimony of Stephen W. Preston, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, May 21, 2014.
- ¹⁵ 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism. Note: previous versions of the National Strategy for Counterterrorism were issued in 2003 and 2006. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁷ See for example, "Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities," Department of Defense, February 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/news/Homelanddefensestrategy.pdf>.
- ¹⁸ See for example, Testimony of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SOLIC) Mike Lumpkin, and the Commander of Special Operations Command, Admiral Bill McRaven, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 11, 2014. On page 12, Lumpkin states, "If it's, again, one of those al Qaeda affiliates, then the AUMF gives us the authority to act as necessary." <http://www.armed-services doc/14-17%20-%203-11-14.pdf>. He later states, "I think that if there is an affiliate, an associate, and it's been recognized, regardless of what they call themselves in the relationship, I think that—of course we'd go to the lawyer's group, but my sense is that we would probably be in a good place to use the AUMF."
- ¹⁹ "Who are we at war with? The answer is (still) classified," *The National Interest*, July 26, 2013.
- ²⁰ Testimony of Stephen W. Preston, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, May 21, 2014.
- ²¹ "A Persistent Threat: The evolution of al Qa'ida and other salafi jihadists," Rand Corporation, 2014.
- ²² The term "like-minded" individuals or extremists was used when discussing Al Qaeda in the 2013 and 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessments, but not in prior assessments.
- ²³ "State Dept. on Designation of Al Nusrah Front as Terrorist Group," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, December 11, 2012.
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Chapter 2

THE “ISLAMIC STATE” CRISIS AND U.S. POLICY*

***Kenneth Katzman, Christopher M. Blanchard,
Carla E. Humud, Matthew C. Weed,
Rhoda Margesson and Alex Tiersky***

SUMMARY

The Islamic State is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that has expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria since 2013, threatening the security of both countries and drawing increased attention from the international community. There is debate over the degree to which the Islamic State organization might represent a direct terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland or to U.S. facilities and personnel in the region.

The Islamic State (IS) was initially part of the insurgency against coalition forces in Iraq and has in the years since the 2011 U.S. withdrawal from Iraq expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria. The Islamic State has thrived in the disaffected Sunni tribal areas of Iraq and in the remote provinces of Syria torn by the civil war. In the summer of 2014, Islamic State-led forces, supported by Sunni Arab tribalists and groups linked to ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, advanced along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, seizing multiple

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population centers including Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Since then, IS forces have massacred Iraqi civilians, often from ethnic or religious minorities, and recently executed two American journalists who had been held in captivity. The Islamic State's tactics have drawn the ire of the international community, increasing U.S. attention on Iraq's political problems and on the civil war in Syria.

On September 10, President Obama announced a multifaceted strategy to "degrade, and ultimately destroy" the Islamic State organization. The announced strategy is for the United States to lead and expand a multilateral coalition that will undertake direct military action, provide support for partner ground forces in Iraq and Syria, gather and share intelligence and use financial measures to try to progressively shrink the geographic and political space, manpower, and financial resources available to the Islamic State. The Administration and its allies all have ruled out deploying combat forces to either Iraq or Syria.

Some assert that the U.S. strategy will attract the support of Sunnis in both Syria and Iraq in a broad effort to defeat the Islamic State. Others assess that the strategy might have minimal effect because local anti-IS forces will not have support from U.S. or other western combat troops.

THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Islamic State (IS, aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL/ISIS) is a transnational Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group that has expanded its control over areas of northwestern Iraq and northeastern Syria since 2013, threatening the security of both countries and drawing increased attention from the international community. The Islamic State has thrived in the disaffected Sunni Muslim-inhabited areas of Iraq and in the remote provinces of Syria torn by the civil war. The Islamic State's tactics have drawn the ire of the international community, increasing U.S. attention on Iraq's political problems and on the civil war in Syria.

Although the Islamic State is considered a direct threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, it is unclear if it currently poses a significant direct threat to U.S. homeland security. In September 2014, National Counterterrorism Center Director Matthew Olsen stated that the group poses "a direct and significant threat to us—and to Iraqi and Syrian civilians—in the region and potentially to us here at home."¹ Olsen reported that the Islamic State "has more than 10,000 fighters ... And its strategic goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate through armed conflict with governments it considers apostate—including Iraq, Syria, and the United States." Olsen stated that "we have no credible information that

ISIL is planning to attack the U.S.,” and highlighted potential threats posed by foreign fighters with Western passports. According to Olsen, as many as 12,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Syria, including more than 1,000 Europeans, and more than 100 U.S. citizens. Previous U.S. government assessments suggest that these fighters hail from more than 50 countries and that among them are Al Qaeda-linked veterans of previous conflicts. Olsen also stated that U.S. counterterrorism officials “remain mindful of the possibility that an ISIL-sympathizer—perhaps motivated by online propaganda—could conduct a limited, self-directed attack here at home with no warning.” However, Olsen noted that, “In our view, any threat to the U.S. homeland from these types of extremists is likely to be limited in scope and scale.”

Statements and media materials released by the Islamic State reflect an uncompromising, exclusionary worldview and a relentless ambition. Statements by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammed al Adnani feature sectarian calls for violence and identify Shiites, non-Muslims, and unsupportive Sunnis as enemies in the group’s struggle to establish “the Islamic State” and to revive their vision of “the caliphate.”² The group describes Iraqi Shiites derogatorily as “rejectionists” and “polytheists” and paints the Iraqi government as a puppet of Iran. Similar ire is aimed at Syrian Alawites and the Asad government, although some sources allege that operatives for the Islamic State and its antecedents have benefitted from evolving financial and security arrangements with Damascus that started during the 2003-2011 U.S. military presence in Iraq.

In July 2012, Al Baghdadi warned U.S. leaders that “the mujahidin have set out to chase the affiliates of your armies that have fled.... You will see them in your own country, God willing. The war with you has just begun.”³ In January 2014, Al Baghdadi threatened the United States directly, saying, “Know, O defender of the Cross, that a proxy war will not help you in the Levant, just as it will not help you in Iraq. Soon, you will be in direct conflict—God permitting—against your will.”⁴ English language propaganda and recruiting material released by the group in connection with its recent executions of U.S. citizens James Foley and Stephen Sotloff suggest the group is attempting to portray itself as responding to U.S. aggression, a posture adopted by its predecessors and now rivals in Al Qaeda.

Background

The Islamic State's ideological and organizational roots lie in the forces built and led by the late Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq from 2002 through 2006—*Tawhid wal Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad) and Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers (aka Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQ-I). Following Zarqawi's death at the hands of U.S. forces in June 2006, AQ-I leaders repackaged the group as a coalition known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). ISI lost its two top leaders in 2010 and was weakened, but not eliminated, by the time of the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. Under the leadership of Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al Badri al Samarra'i (aka Abu Bakr al Baghdadi),⁵ ISI rebuilt its capabilities. By early 2013, the group was conducting dozens of deadly attacks a month inside Iraq. The precise nature of ISI's relationship to Al Qaeda leaders from 2006 onward is unclear. In recent months, Islamic State leaders have stated their view that their group "is not and has never been an offshoot of Al Qaeda,"⁶ and that, given that they view themselves as a state and a sovereign political entity, they have given leaders of the Al Qaeda organization deference rather than pledges of obedience.

In April 2013, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced his intent to merge his forces in Iraq and Syria with those of the Syria-based Jabhat al Nusra, under the name the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS). Jabhat al Nusra and Al Qaeda leaders rejected the merger, underscoring growing tensions among Sunni extremists in the region.

THE SITUATION IN IRAQ

Many observers assessed that the Iraqi government contained an earlier IS-led insurrection that began in Anbar Province in January 2014, even though the government had been unable to regain control of the city of Fallujah from IS-led forces. Such assessments were upended on June 10, 2014, when the Islamic State captured the northern city of Mosul amid mass surrenders and desertions by ISF officers and personnel. According to one expert, about 60 out of 243 Iraqi army combat battalions could not be accounted for.⁷ In its offensive, the Islamic State reportedly has been either joined, supported, or enabled by Sunni tribal fighters, former members of the late Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and military, and other Sunni residents.⁸ Their enabling of the offensive, despite reservations among many Sunnis about the Islamic State's brutal tactics against opponents and its intention to impose its version of

Islamic law, appeared to reflect broad Sunni dissatisfaction with the government of Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki, who was replaced in September as discussed below.⁹

After taking Mosul, the IS-led fighters advanced to Saddam’s hometown of Tikrit and other cities, and into Diyala Province, which has roughly equal numbers of Sunnis and Shiites. In the course of the offensive, IS and allied fighters looted banks, freed prisoners, and reportedly captured a substantial amount of U.S.-supplied military equipment, such as HMMWVs (“Humvees”) and artillery equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) targeting systems.¹⁰ Islamic State-led fighters captured the city of Tal Afar west of Mosul on June 16 and reached the outskirts of Baqubah, capital of Diyala, about 38 miles northeast of Baghdad, by June 17. Islamic State-led insurgents in Anbar, with the support of some tribal allies, reportedly seized additional cities along the Euphrates River in that province. In mid-July, IS members in Mosul reportedly ordered remaining Christians there to leave the city, and most apparently complied.¹¹ After initially establishing a relatively quiet front line with territory controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its *peshmerga* militia fighters, IS-led fighters went on the offensive against Kurdish-controlled territory in early August, as discussed in a separate section below.

Islamic State-led militant attacks on the country’s main oil refinery at Baiji have caused gasoline shortages in northern Iraq, including in the KRG.¹² However, the effect of the fighting on Iraq’s overall oil production and exports has been relatively limited, in large part because about 75% of Iraq’s oil is produced and exported from Iraq’s south, where Sunni insurgents are far fewer in number.

Shiite militias mobilized to try to help the government prevent IS forces from reaching Baghdad. The Iraqi capital is reportedly about 80% Shiite-inhabited, and many Shiites there and from elsewhere volunteered for militia service—in part answering a call by Iraq’s leading Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani—to help the ISF. With support from these militias, the government forces regrouped to some extent, and U.S. officials expressed confidence that the IS-led offensive would not capture the city outright, although the ISF might yet lose parts of the city.¹³ Islamic State-led militants have been able to approach Baghdad International Airport to the southwest of the city. ISF-led forces have conducted some limited counterattacks on Tikrit and cities near Tikrit in Anbar Province, but General Dempsey stated on July 3 that the ISF would have difficulty recapturing any lost ground without external support.¹⁴

The ISF collapse in the north enabled the *peshmerga* (Kurdish militia) to capture Kirkuk and large nearby oil fields abandoned by the ISF. The Kurds have long sought to control that oil-rich region, which they claim is historic Kurdish territory, and to affiliate the province with their autonomous region run by a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). On July 11, *peshmerga* reportedly seized control of two key oil fields near Kirkuk from a state-controlled company. Many experts assert that the Kurds are unlikely to willingly return control of Kirkuk and related areas to the central government.¹⁵

The *peshmerga* gains prompted renewed discussion among KRG leaders about seeking outright independence from Iraq. In early July, KRG President Masoud Barzani asked the KRG parliament to plan a referendum on independence.¹⁶ However, Kurdish leaders, including former Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, said the crisis the KRG faced from the Islamic State offensive against KRG-controlled territory in August has caused KRG leaders to largely shelve the independence effort, at least temporarily. It remains unclear what practical gains would accrue from outright independence, because the Kurds in Iraq already have a substantial degree of autonomy. KRG leaders might view the independence issue primarily as leverage in disputes with Baghdad, such as those over KRG oil exports and revenue-sharing.

Islamic State Goes on Offensive In Kurdish-Controlled Territory

The Kurdish region was shaken—and further talk of pushing for independence apparently stalled indefinitely—when Islamic State-led forces advanced into territory controlled by the *peshmerga* in early August. In the face of superior Islamic State firepower, the relatively lightly armed Kurdish forces retreated from several towns inhabited mostly by Christians and other Iraqi minorities, particularly the Yazidis. The Yazidis are mostly Kurdish speaking and practice a mix of ancient religions, including Zoroastrianism, which held sway in Iran before the advent of Islam.¹⁷ Fearing Islamic State threats to execute them if they did not convert to Islam, an estimated 35,000–50,000 Yazidis fled to Sinjar Mountain.¹⁸ By August 8, Islamic State-led fighters had advanced to within about 40 miles of the KRG capital of Erbil, causing some flight from the city, and heightening U.S. concern about the security of U.S. diplomatic and military personnel there. Reports of human rights violations by the Islamic State emerged, including murder, kidnappings,

forced conversions, and physical and sexual assault.¹⁹ Islamic State-led forces captured Iraq’s largest dam, the Mosul Dam, as well, which Kurdish leaders assert could have been damaged or used by the Islamic State to flood wide areas of northern and central Iraq.

Effect on Iraqi Government Formation

The crisis has contributed to major change in Iraq’s leadership, in part an Iraqi response to stated U.S. concerns that Prime Minister Maliki’s policies had alienated the Sunni Arab community. Elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR) were held on April 30, 2014, beginning the process of forming a new government. By informal agreement, the COR speakership is held by a Sunni Arab; the largely ceremonial presidency is held by a Kurd; and the powerful executive post of Prime Minister is held by a Shiite Arab. Several Iraqi factions – as well as some within Maliki’s core coalition – opposed a third term for Maliki as Prime Minister in spite of the dominant performance of the Maliki-led “State of Law” coalition in the election. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called for the Iraqi people “to find leadership... that is prepared to be inclusive and share power.”²⁰

In July, the COR selected as COR Speaker Salim al Jabburi (a Sunni), and two deputies, and veteran Kurdish figure Fouad Masoum as Iraq’s President. It is the constitutional responsibility of the President to ask the candidate of the largest bloc in the COR to form a government. On August 11, President Masoum formally asked Haydar al Abbadi, a 62-year old member of Maliki’s Da’wa Party, to become Prime Minister-designate. Al Abbadi’s selection attracted public support from U.S. officials as well as from senior figures in Iran, causing support for Maliki’s initial challenge of the al-Abbadi designation to collapse. The designation gave him 30 days (until September 10) to form and achieve parliamentary confirmation for a new cabinet. His work program and all but two of his ministerial nominations were approved by the COR on September 8, enabling al-Abbadi to assume the prime ministership. The two powerful security posts of Interior and Defense Minister were not filled with permanent selections; alAbbadi asserts he will nominate selections to those positions during the week of September 15. On September 10, 2014, in conjunction with a visit by Secretary of State John Kerry, al-Abbadi proposed to recruit Sunnis to a new “national guard” force that would protect Sunni-inhabited areas that might be taken back from Islamic State control.

Iranian Involvement in the Iraq Crisis

The Islamic State gains appeared to align the interests of Iran and the United States in Iraq. After the Islamic State capture of Mosul, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the United States was “open to discussions [with Iran on Iraq] if there’s something constructive that can be contributed by Iran.”²¹ U.S. diplomats reportedly discussed the situation in Iraq at the margins of June 16-20 talks on Iran’s nuclear program, reportedly seeking Iran’s cooperation to compel Prime Minister Maliki to share power or be replaced outright.²² The U.S. State Department sought to refute assertions that the bilateral discussion on Iraq could provide Iran additional leverage in the ongoing nuclear talks with the United States and its partner countries.²³

In actions that appear to further U.S. objectives in Iraq, Iran reportedly has been delivering arms and ammunition to Iraq and the *peshmerga*. In early July, Iran returned to Iraq about a dozen of the 100+ Iraqi combat aircraft that were flown to Iran at the start of the 1991 war between Iraq and the United States-led coalition. Iranian pilots apparently also are flying the aircraft: in July 2014 Iran announced that one of its pilots had died in operations in Iraq.²⁴ As noted above, Iranian leaders backed the appointment of Abadi as Prime Minister-designate, abandoning their longtime ally Maliki.²⁵

Many observers remain skeptical that that the United States could or should cooperate with Iran in Iraq. Iran helped establish many of the Shiite militias that fought the United States during 2003-2011, and Iran reportedly has sent Islamic Revolutionary Guard-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) personnel into Iraq to advise the Shiite militias fighting alongside the ISF. The participation of the militias has increased tensions with Iraq’s Sunnis, including those who live in mostly Shiite-inhabited Baghdad and in mixed provinces such as Diyala. Anecdotal reports indicate that some Shiite militia fighters have carried out reprisals against Sunnis who the militias accuse of supporting the Islamic State. Some of the Shiite militiamen who are fighting in Iraq had returned from Syria, where they were helping President Asad against Sunni-led armed rebels.

SITUATION IN SYRIA²⁶

Since 2013, Islamic State fighters have used Syria both as a staging ground for attacks in Iraq and as a parallel theater of operations.²⁷ In early 2014, IS fighters reestablished control in most areas of the northern Syrian

province of Raqqah and reasserted itself to the east in Dayr az Zawr, a province rich in oil and gas resources bordering the Anbar region of Iraq. Since late 2013, the Islamic State has controlled several oilfields in Dayr az Zawr and reportedly has drawn revenue from oil sales to the Syrian government. With the proceeds, the group was able to maintain operational independence from Al Qaeda's leadership and pay competitive salaries to its fighters. The Islamic State derived additional revenue in Syria by imposing taxes on local populations and demanding a percentage of the funds involved in humanitarian and commercial operations in areas under its control.²⁸ The Islamic State also has operated north of Dayr az Zawr in Hasakah province, establishing a connection to Iraq's Nineveh province that it was apparently able to exploit in its eventual advance towards Mosul.

IS gains in Iraq are likely to facilitate the flow of weapons and fighters into eastern Syria to the Islamic State and other groups, both because of the publicity from these gains and because of the supply lines they open. Captured U.S.-origin military equipment provided to Iraqi security forces has appeared in photos reportedly taken in Syria and posted on social media outlets. Anecdotal reporting suggests that the group relies on brutality and intimidation to manage communities under its control, and in some areas partnerships with local armed groups appear to facilitate IS control.

At some point, the Islamic State's expanding theater of conflict could subject it to overextension. IS gains may also motivate the Iraqi and Syrian governments to cooperate more closely in seeking to counter the group. Increased cooperation between Damascus and Baghdad could alter the dynamics in both conflicts. It could also undermine ongoing U.S. efforts to encourage Iraqi leaders to support U.S. efforts to press Asad to step down in favor of a transitional government. Increased Iraqi-Syrian cooperation could also decrease the likelihood that Baghdad would comply with U.S. requests to crack down on Iranian overflights of weapons and equipment to Damascus.

Further IS advances in Iraq could weaken the Syrian's government's ability to hold ground in contested areas, as some Iraqi Shiite militants who had previously fought alongside Asad forces return home to combat the IS.²⁹ In mid-June 2014, Syrian forces conducted air strikes against IS-held areas of Raqqah and Hasakah in coordination with the Iraqi government, according to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.³⁰ Syria later struck IS targets near a border crossing between the two states and continues to conduct airstrikes on IS positions in Raqqah province. IS fighters in late July and early August escalated attacks on government army and air force bases in

northeastern Syria, capturing several, seizing armaments, and executing captured Syrian military personnel.³¹

It is unclear what impact IS gains in Iraq would have outside of northeastern Syria. At least half of Syria-based IS fighters are Syrian or Iraqi tribesmen, according to a Syrian IS defector.³² Like other segments of the Syrian opposition, Syrian tribes have at times been reluctant to expand hostilities against government forces beyond their own local areas.³³ The Islamic State to date has concentrated its forces in Syria's northeast, and has largely avoided regular confrontations in the country's main urban areas in Syria's western half. In early August, Syrian rebels who recently pledged allegiance to the Islamic State clashed with Lebanese Armed Forces for control of the Lebanese town of Aarsal, 13 km west of the Syrian border. However, some observers note that there is no indication that the group coordinated its attack in advance with IS leadership.³⁴

Some ongoing IS operations in Syria are focused in Dayr az Zawr, as the group fights to consolidate its supply lines to the city of Abu Kamal, a key node along the Syria-Iraq border. Press and social media reports suggest that IS, by mid-July, had seized large sectors of the provincial capital of Dayr az-Zawr, although some neighborhoods remain contested by the regime and other rebel groups.³⁵ Following the IS declaration of a caliphate, many local and tribal rebel forces surrendered to the group and withdrew from their positions, further expanding the IS presence in the Dayr az-Zawr countryside.³⁶ Any Iraqi or U.S. efforts to disrupt or sever IS supply lines through Abu Kamal or between Dayr az Zawr and Mosul could benefit Syrian military and Nusra Front forces also operating in the area. Islamic State fighters also remain engaged in operations against Syrian armed forces southwest of Raqqah and against a range of armed Syrian opposition groups to the northeast of Aleppo.

Syrian Kurdish fighters from the People's Protection Units (known as the YPG) continue to clash with IS fighters along the border with Iraq and Turkey.³⁷ YPG forces in early August established security corridors along the Iraqi border, enabling some refugees fleeing IS violence in Iraq to cross into Kurdish-held areas of Syria, according to a Syrian Kurdish aid worker.³⁸

U.S. RESPONSES AND OPTIONS

At the NATO summit in Wales during September 4-5, 2014, the Administration began to unveil a comprehensive strategy for its efforts to defeat the Islamic State organization. President Obama elaborated on the

evolving strategy in a speech on September 10, 2014. In summary, the United States seeks to lead and build a multilateral coalition to try to progressively reduce the geographic and political space, manpower, and financial resources available to the Islamic State. The Administration apparently expects different members of the coalition to employ varying means to counter the Islamic State, including but not necessarily limited to direct military action, support for partner ground forces in Iraq and Syria, intelligence gathering and sharing, and financial measures. Many of the actions announced by President Obama are already under way in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in Syria. Among the major points President Obama announced are the following:³⁹

- The U.S. intelligence community believes that thousands of foreigners have joined the Islamic State organization in Iraq and Syria and that these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.
- The United States has not detected specific Islamic State plotting against the U.S. homeland, but the group’s leaders have threatened the United States and its allies.
- The strategy will not involve deployment of U.S. combat troops, but will rely on strengthening local partners who are fighting Islamic State forces on the ground.
- The United States will expand airstrikes in Iraq to help the ISF and the Kurdish peshmerga advance against IS-led forces, and might begin to strike IS targets in Syria.
- The United States will increase support for Iraqi and Kurdish forces in Iraq by providing an additional 475 advisers (beyond the 300 already deployed), and will support Iraqi efforts to establish a “national guard” to help Iraqi Sunni Arabs defend themselves from the Islamic State.
- President Obama reiterated an Administration request for Congress to give the Administration authority to train and equip vetted Syrian rebel forces. This issue is discussed in detail below.
- The United States will not coordinate any actions in Syria with the Asad regime “that terrorizes its own people” and “will never regain the legitimacy it has lost.”
- Working with international partners, the United States will seek to prevent Islamic State terrorist attacks by increasing efforts to cut off Islamic State finances; improving intelligence on the group; strengthening anti-terrorism defenses; countering the Islamic State’s

“warped ideology”; and stemming “the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the Middle East.”

- The U.S.-led coalition will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those displaced by Islamic State offensives, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims and Christians and members of other religious minorities.

The success of the strategy could largely depend on the participation of other actors. A ten-country “core coalition” announced during the NATO summit consists of the United States, Britain, France, Australia, Canada, Germany, Turkey, Italy, Poland, and Denmark. On September 11, numerous Arab states announced support for the strategy. According to the Administration and many outside experts, the strategy depends heavily on cooperation from the Arab countries to delegitimize the Islamic State’s ideology, cut off its finances, and provide intelligence on its recruitment patterns and leaders. Apparently pursuing its own interests, Iran has been generally cooperating with U.S. policy in Iraq, but the United States has ruled out any formally bringing Iran into any U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition. It remains to be seen how Iran may respond to any expanded U.S. efforts to provide support or training to Syrian opposition groups, which Iran may view as a threat to its interests. In Syria, the United States and Iran have generally been on opposite sides: the United States supports Asad’s ouster in favor of a transition regime, whereas Iran is materially supporting Asad’s remaining in power.

Actions in Iraq

1. The U.S. strategy builds on existing action undertaken in Iraq. Citing the legacy of the U.S. intervention in Iraq and the potential Islamic State threat to U.S. interests, President Obama stated on June 13, 2014, that the Iraqi government “needs additional support to break the momentum of extremist groups and bolster the capabilities of Iraqi security forces.”⁴⁰ The following represent possible U.S. options to address the ongoing situation in Iraq, and information on whether and to what extent they have been employed.

- *Advice, Training, and Intelligence Gathering.* In a June 19 statement, President Obama announced that he had authorized sending up to 300 U.S. military personnel to serve as advisers and to assess the ISF and

- gather intelligence on the Islamic State. As noted above, on September 10 he authorized an additional 475 advisers to help the ISF and *peshmerga* organize ground advances. An additional 820 military personnel have been sent to help secure the U.S. Embassy and other U.S. facilities in Baghdad and Irbil, to protect evacuation routes such as the international airport in Baghdad, and to operate surveillance aircraft. This total includes 350 military personnel authorized on September 2, 2014, to deploy for these purposes. The advisers have formed “Joint Operations Centers” in Baghdad (U.S.-ISF) and Irbil (U.S.-*peshmerga*) and began assessing the ISF. Their first assessment reportedly concluded that only about half of all ISF units are sufficiently capable for U.S. advisers to help them regain captured territory, were the President to decide on such an expanded mission.⁴¹
- *Airstrikes.* Citing as an objective stopping the advance on Irbil and reducing the threat to American diplomats and advisers there, on August 7, 2014, President Obama authorized targeted airstrikes against Islamic State positions that pose a threat to U.S. personnel or facilities or to alleviate humanitarian suffering caused by the Islamic State. Since August 8, U.S. combat aircraft and armed unmanned aerial vehicles have conducted over 150 strikes against Islamic State heavy weaponry, checkpoints, and other positions. The strikes blunted the Islamic State advance on Irbil and, on August 14, 2014, President Obama announced that the strikes had succeeded in breaking the siege of Sinjar and in allowing the *peshmerga* and ISF to safely evacuate most of the Yazidi internally displaced persons (IDPs) there.⁴² Additional strikes helped *peshmerga* and ISF forces drive Islamic State fighters from Mosul Dam, which the Islamic State purportedly could have used to flood large parts of Iraq. As noted above, the President on September 10 announced that strikes would “go beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions so that we’re hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on the offensive.”
 - *Weapons Sales.* Since the Islamic State-led capture of Mosul in June, the United States has announced sales of over 5,000 additional HELLFIRE air-to-surface missiles to Baghdad. Deliveries of U.S.-made F-16s and Apaches, purchased in 2011 and 2012, are in their early stages. After the Islamic State move toward Irbil, the Administration reportedly began supplying mostly lighter weaponry and ammunition directly to the *peshmerga*, through the Central Intelligence Agency.⁴³ That channel is a means of adapting to a

general policy that requires all U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS, run by the Defense Department) to be provided to a country's central government. U.S. military officials have said that the *peshmerga* require heavy and long range weapons to be able to counter the Islamic State's use of captured U.S. weapons,⁴⁴ but have not specified which systems might be eventually provided to the Kurds. Several other countries, such as Britain, Germany, and France, have announced they would send weaponry to the *peshmerga*.

- *Humanitarian Airdrops.* During early August 2014, the U.S. military conducted airdrops of food and water to those trapped on Sinjar Mountain. In late August, the U.S. military airdropped humanitarian aid to the town of Amerli (in eastern Salahuddin Province), inhabited by ethnic Turkmen Shiite Muslims, which was surrounded by ISIS fighters. With help from U.S. airstrikes, the ISF and allied Shiite militiamen broke the siege of the town.
- *Direct U.S. combat deployment.* President Obama has repeatedly ruled out this option.⁴⁵ He has stated that intervention by U.S. combat troops is not capable of fixing the underlying political problems that caused the insurrection.

Options in Syria

Well before the President's September 10 speech on an anti-Islamic State strategy, Administration officials had asserted that countering the Islamic State will require dealing in some way with the group's branch in Syria. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey on 21 August asserted that the group could not be defeated without accounting for its Syrian branch, stating that the group "will have to be addressed on both sides of what is essentially at this point a nonexistent border."⁴⁶ Yet, the Administration apparently faces a dilemma because the Administration has sought to pressure the Asad government into negotiating with opposition groups and fulfilling its pledges with regard to chemical weapons. Confronting Islamic State forces in Syria could produce the unintended consequence of taking military pressure off the Asad regime by weakening one major force arrayed against him.

As noted above, the U.S. strategy against the Islamic State's Syria branch appears to center on supporting moderate rebel forces who are fighting not only the Islamic State but also Syrian government forces. On September 5, President Obama stated,

With respect to the situation on the ground in Syria, we will not be placing U.S. ground troops to try to control the areas that are part of the conflict inside of Syria. I don't think that's necessary for us to accomplish our goal. We are going to have to find effective partners on the ground to push back against ISIL. And the moderate coalition there is one that we can work with. We have experience working with many of them. They have been, to some degree, outgunned and outmanned, and that's why it's important for us to work with our friends and allies to support them more effectively.⁴⁷

President Obama's requests to Congress for authority and resources to train and equip vetted members of the Syrian opposition in support of U.S. efforts to combat the Islamic State organization—reiterated in the President's September 10 speech—has reinvigorated congressional debate on the subject. The Administration's June 2014 request for FY2015 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funds included a request for funds and authorities for a proposed \$1.5 billion Syria Regional Stabilization Initiative (RSI), \$500 million of which would support an overt training and equipment program for select Syrians.⁴⁸

As of early September, congressional consideration of this request had merged with congressional consideration of a proposed continuing resolution to fund government operations after September 30, 2014. It remains to be seen whether a version of the Administration's requested authority and funding will be included in a proposed continuing resolution, whether it may be considered as an amendment to such a continuing resolution, or whether Congress might act on the proposal independently. Some congressional committees already have acted on the President's June 2014 request for funding and authorization for such a mission.

The Senate Armed Services Committee reported version of the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1209 of S. 2410) would authorize the Department of Defense, with the concurrence of the State Department, to train and equip vetted members of select Syrian opposition forces for limited purposes through the year 2018.

Section 9015 of the Senate Appropriation Committee's version of the FY2015 Defense Appropriations bill (H.R. 4870) would authorize assistance, including the provision of defense articles and defense services, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition, for, among other purposes, “protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from threats posed by terrorists in Syria.” Under this section, the committee specifies that up to \$500 million from the Defense Department's

Operation and Maintenance (O&M), a Defense-wide account, may be used for a support program. The Senate Appropriations Defense subcommittee considered and rejected a proposed amendment that would have stripped the authority and funding for the Syria program from the bill.

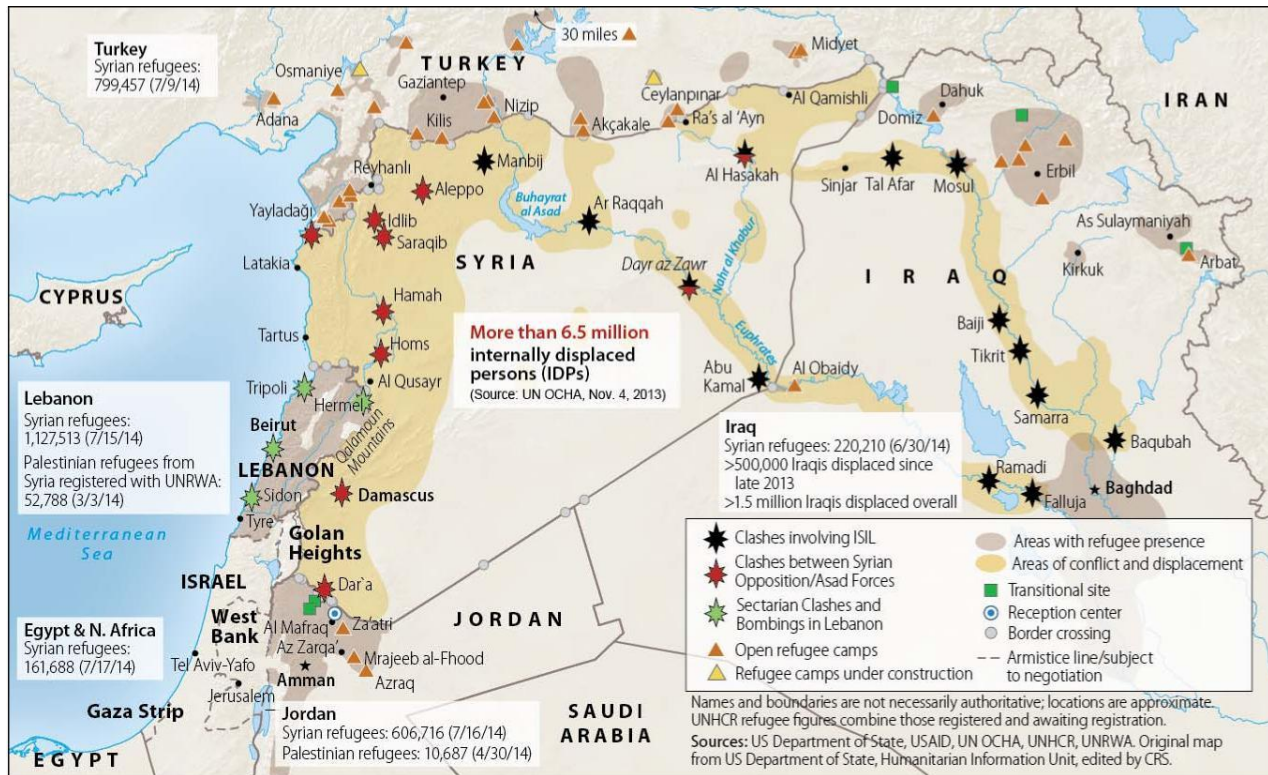
Advocates of continued U.S. support for select opposition groups in Syria have argued that the withdrawal or reduction of such assistance would bolster less cooperative or friendly groups. Advocates have further argued that if the United States withdraws or reduces its support, then it may “force” moderate groups to turn to extremist groups for funding and support—thereby increasing the influence of extremists while reducing U.S. leverage. Critics of continued or expanded U.S. support have argued that such assistance risks exacerbating rivalry among opposition groups and reducing the credibility of groups and individuals seen to be aligned with the United States. Critics of support proposals also have pointed to problems in ensuring the identity and intentions of end users of provided support and the uses of U.S.-provided materiel. The purposes of any expanded U.S. or coalition assistance to armed opposition groups also may be controversial among Syrians. President Obama has suggested that U.S. engagement will remain focused “narrowly” on assisting Syrians in combatting the Islamic State, while continuing “to look for opportunities” to support a political resolution to Syria’s conflict.⁴⁹ Some Syrian political and military opposition forces may resent such a narrow focus and insist on broader support for their anti-Asad goals as a condition of working with a U.S.-backed coalition against the Islamic State.

AUTHORITY FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE AND THE WAR POWERS RESOLUTION⁵⁰

Two enacted authorizations for use of military force (AUMFs) remain current law, but it is unclear whether either could be seen to authorize ongoing and planned U.S. military strikes against the Islamic State organization. The 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF; P.L. 107-40) targets those who perpetrated and supported the 9/11 terror attacks, identified as Al Qaeda and the Taliban, but the executive branch has interpreted the authorization to include targeting forces that are co-belligerent with these two groups, so-called “associated forces.” The Islamic State organization, whose antecedents had links to Al Qaeda, might fall within the definition of an associated force, but a public split between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda in

early 2014 calls this association into question. The 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq (AUMF-I; P.L. 107-243) authorizes force in part to "defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq...." The original authorization focused on the Saddam Hussein regime (since toppled) and destruction of suspected weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, threats long extinguished. The recent successes of Islamic State-led forces in Iraq, however, and its ties to former supporters of the Hussein regime, might be seen as falling within the broad AUMF-I authority to counter the "threat posed by Iraq." At the same time, AUMF-I authority would not cover any military operations against Islamic State forces in Syria.

Although these two authorizations are still current law, the President in his notifications to Congress of deployments and airstrikes against the Islamic State, has relied upon his powers as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive under Article II of the Constitution. Article II of the Constitution makes the President Commander in Chief of the U.S. armed forces, and gives the President certain foreign affairs powers. It is debated to what extent Article II authorizes the President to unilaterally use military force, especially given Congress's Article I war powers, including the power to declare war. The President's authority to use force to defend the United States, its personnel, and citizens against ongoing or imminent attack has been generally accepted, while employing such force simply to further foreign policy or general national security goals is more controversial. In Iraq, the President would seem to have substantial authority to use force to defend U.S. personnel, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, and any other U.S. facilities and property. His notifications of airstrikes, however, have cited as justification furthering U.S. national security and foreign policy interests, and have described uses of force to provide humanitarian assistance, and to aid Iraqi security forces in their fight against the Islamic State. Some, including Members of Congress, argue that these actions fall outside the President's Article II powers and require congressional authorization. The President's uses of military force are subject to the provisions of the War Powers Resolution (WPR; P.L. 93-148). Since August, President Obama has reported to Congress on four uses of military force in Iraq "consistent with" the WPR. In cases where the President has introduced armed forces into active or imminent hostilities, the WPR requires termination of the use of U.S. armed forces and withdrawal of those forces 60 days after a WPR report is required, unless Congress (1) has declared war or authorized the action; (2) has extended the period by law; or (3) cannot meet due to armed attack. The President can extend the deadline for withdrawal for 30 days if he certifies it is needed to affect a safe withdrawal.



Notes: Clash symbols in Syria and Iraq denote areas where recent clashes have occurred, not necessarily areas of current control.

Figure 1. Iraq, Syria, and Regional Unrest.

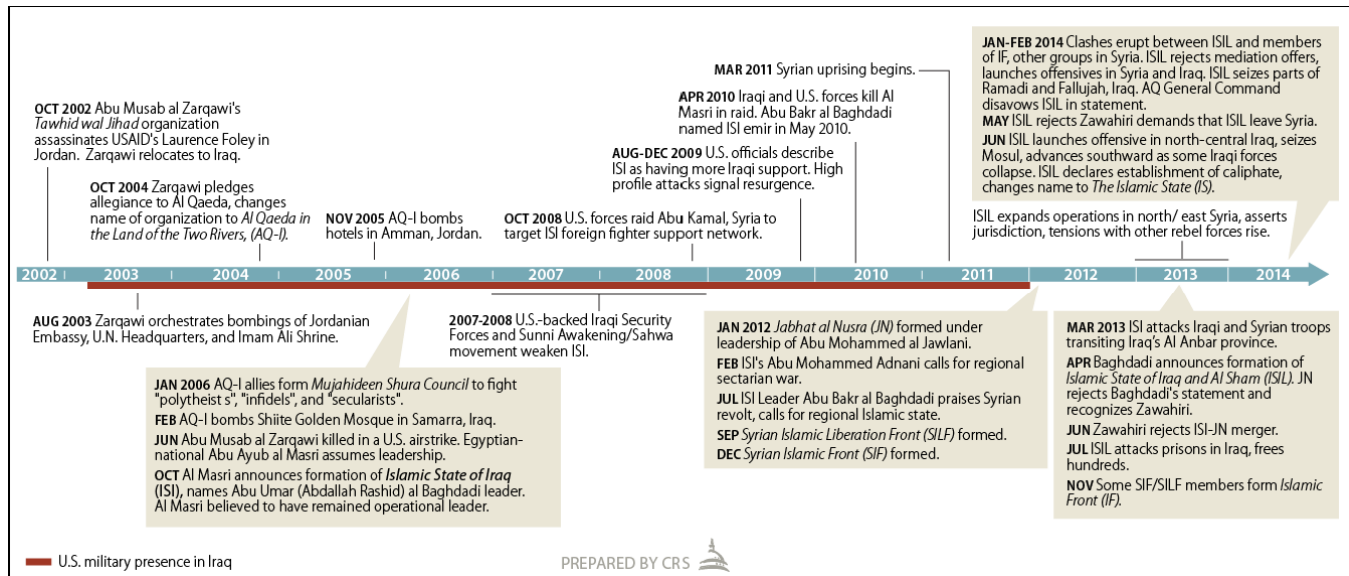


Figure 2. Evolution of IS/ISIL and Extremist Groups in Iraq and Syria, 2002-2014.

The airstrikes notifications seem likely to concern activities considered hostilities under the WPR, and therefore could be considered to trigger the 60-day withdrawal period. There are questions, however, about whether the 60-day period is currently running, on what date it began, or whether it has reset each time one of the reported military operations has ceased. U.S. armed forces conducting airstrikes are likely no longer over Iraqi territory, and the troops that are still in Iraq are not there to engage in hostilities. It is unclear whether these frequent reports are intended simply to ensure that Congress is kept informed of ongoing U.S. action in Iraq or, alternatively, whether it is intended to have some consequence for assessing when and whether the WPR's 60-day deadline for termination of hostilities begins and ends—that is to say, that each of the particular actions reported constitutes a separate military action that is subject to its own 60-day deadline for termination.⁵¹ Such an interpretation, however, would arguably undercut the WPR's goal of ensuring that U.S. forces were not engaged in hostilities against an enemy force for a sustained period of time without congressional authorization.

SELECTED ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE CRISIS

Humanitarian Impact and Response⁵²

An estimated 1.8 million people have been displaced in Iraq in 2014 creating an urgent humanitarian crisis.⁵³ The actual displacement figures remain fluid and impossible to fully ascertain. Particularly in conflict areas in northern and central Iraq, it is difficult to monitor and track the mass and sometimes multiple displacements. Of the 1.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), an estimated 850,000 are seeking shelter in Iraq's Kurdistan region, while increased movements to central and southern Iraq are straining the response capacities of host communities.⁵⁴ There is an immediate need for food, water, shelter, and health services.⁵⁵ There are also increasing concerns about the rise in sectarian tensions across the country made worse by the conflict situation and large numbers of IDPs. Although the needs of all IDPs in Iraq remain significant, civilians trapped in conflict-affected areas, whose access to basic services is curtailed or non-existent, are considered to be in need of lifesaving humanitarian assistance.⁵⁶ Recent situations, such as those involving Sinjar Mountain and the siege of the town of Amerli, where potential major humanitarian and human rights disasters were reportedly

largely averted, highlight the plight of IDPs, particularly those who are surrounded by Islamic State forces.

While national and international humanitarian efforts have been severely constrained in providing assistance and protection to these IDPs, on August 13, 2014, the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, announced that the United Nations had declared a “Level 3 Emergency” for Iraq to help facilitate mobilization of resources for the humanitarian response.⁵⁷ With the Level 3 declaration, U.N. and humanitarian partners continue to increase staffing and resources, but they are calling for guarantees of safe and unhindered access of humanitarian staff and in the distribution of relief supplies.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) is coordinating the humanitarian response by the U.N. Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and some partner organizations and with the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). UNOCHA launched a revised Strategic Response Plan (SRP) for Iraq in June, requesting \$312.1 million in funding to include humanitarian support for the significantly increased caseload of IDPs and a wider geographical focus. Total U.S. government humanitarian funding to Iraq in FY2014 (as of September 10, 2014) is more than \$186 million.⁵⁸

The U.N. Secretary-General issued a statement on August 7, 2014, condemning the attacks in Iraq and the impact on vulnerable minority communities.⁵⁹ The members of the U.N. Security Council also issued a statement condemning the situation in Nineveh and urging the international community to provide support to those in need. The Security Council reiterated that widespread or systematic attacks directed against a civilian population because of their ethnic background or political or religious beliefs could constitute a crime against humanity, and further, that all parties must abide by international humanitarian law. It urged the parties to stop human rights violations and enable humanitarian access and the delivery of assistance.⁶⁰

Responses to Threats to U.S. Personnel, Facilities, and Citizens⁶¹

The crisis has prompted the Administration to undertake a number of measures to ensure the safety of its personnel in Iraq, including direct military action, relocation of personnel, and deployment of additional protective assets. The Department of State has also repeatedly warned U.S. citizens unaffiliated with the U.S. government of the threats to their security.

President Obama affirmed on August 9 that the protection of American diplomats and military personnel in the city of Irbil was among the principal justifications for conducting targeted airstrikes against ISIL in the area. He also asserted that the United States would “take action” in response to any further threat to U.S. facilities or personnel.⁶²

A number of diplomatic personnel had previously been moved to the Consulate General in Irbil from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. On June 15, the Department of State announced that while the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad would remain open, a number of personnel would be “temporarily relocated” to Consulate Generals in Basrah and Irbil as well as to Department of State facilities in Amman, Jordan. The relocations were reportedly carried out by non-military means. The announcement stated that a “substantial majority of the U.S. Embassy presence in Iraq” would remain in place and that, with an expected addition of security personnel, the Embassy would be “fully equipped” to carry out “its national security mission.”⁶³ On August 10, the Iraq Travel Warning was updated to announce that “a limited number” of additional staff had been relocated from the Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil to the Consulate General in Basrah as well as to Department of State facilities in Amman, Jordan.⁶⁴ Despite these measures, President Obama on August 9 affirmed that “we’re not moving our embassy anytime soon. We’re not moving our consulate anytime soon.”⁶⁵

Military assets and personnel have played a key role in securing U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel in Iraq. News reports suggested that roughly 200 Marine Corps guards and contractors were in place at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad prior to the crisis to protect the Embassy.⁶⁶ Since the crisis began, the White House has announced three deployments to reinforce that number. On June 16, the White House informed Congress that up to approximately 275 U.S. military personnel were being dispatched to Iraq to assist with the temporary relocation of diplomatic personnel, a deployment undertaken with the consent of the Government of Iraq.⁶⁷ On June 30, the White House announced the deployment of up to an additional 200 U.S. Armed Forces personnel to provide increased security to the U.S. Embassy and its support facilities, as well as to reinforce the Baghdad International Airport. According to the White House notification to Congress, provided “consistent with” the War Powers Act, the deployed forces would be accompanied by helicopters and unmanned drones. The force “is deploying for the purpose of protecting U.S. citizens and property, if necessary, and is equipped for combat,” according to the statement, and may/will “remain in Iraq until the security situation becomes such that it is no longer needed.”⁶⁸

The Department of Defense had also previously confirmed that it “has airlift assets at the ready should State Department request them, as per normal interagency support arrangements.”⁶⁹ On September 2, 2014, the Administration announced that an additional 350 U.S. military personnel would deploy to Iraq for similar purposes.

The State Department has also communicated with U.S. citizens in Iraq about threats to their safety. It posted on June 16 an “Emergency Message for U.S. Citizens: Announcement of Relocation of U.S. Embassy Staff,” which urged “U.S. citizens to avoid travel to Iraq because of current safety and security concerns” and advised those concerned about their safety to “make plans to depart by commercial means.” The statement emphasized that the Embassy should not be contacted with requests for assistance with travel arrangements, and that the Embassy “does not offer ‘protection’ services to individuals who feel unsafe.” While the Embassy remained open, the statement said, Embassy services for U.S. citizens throughout Iraq would be limited due to the security environment.⁷⁰

A number of U.S. citizens working in various other capacities in Iraq have also been evacuated in response to the crisis. For example, on June 12, the Department of State confirmed that a number of U.S. citizen contract employees to the Iraqi Government, who were performing services in connection with the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program in Iraq, were “temporarily relocated” by their companies due to security concerns.⁷¹

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR CONGRESSIONAL CONSIDERATION⁷²

What are overall U.S. priorities in the strategy against the Islamic State organization, and how are these priorities shaping the U.S. response?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy against the Islamic State that have been articulated by President Obama? What factors could hinder the implementation or effectiveness of the strategy?

With respect to Iraq, is it realistic and worthwhile for U.S. officials and lawmakers to act in expectation that Iraq’s government can resolve or manage the country’s sectarian, ethnic, and regional differences?

What are the key considerations for the Administration in any decision to expand anti-Islamic State operations into Syria?

Press reports indicate that the United States has spent over \$500 million on military operations in Iraq from June until the beginning of September. How, if at all, should recent developments in Iraq shape congressional consideration of pending authorization and appropriations legislation for defense and foreign assistance? Should the United States provide more assistance, and/or condition foreign or military assistance to Iraq on reforms or other actions by the national government?

What have been the results of the U.S. military assessment of the ISF by the advisers? What recommendations have the advisers made, if any? What additional actions is the Administration prepared to take, based on their recommendations or reports? Would additional authorities or approvals be needed to augment or expand such support?

To what extent do the Islamic State's gains reflect its organizational capabilities?

Please assess the range of Iraqi Sunni views of the Islamic State. With respect to Iraq, what effect, if any, has the replacement of Maliki by Haydar al-Abbadi had on Sunni Arab support for the Islamic State? How have jihadist and tribal figures responded to the Islamic State's declaration of a caliphate in areas under its control?

What options are available for assisting locally organized forces in areas under Islamic State control, or in areas threatened by the Islamic State, who may effectively resist or disrupt the group's operations? How might such options affect the willingness of the regional governments to continue to cooperate with the United States?

To what extent do the interests of Iran and the United States conflict or coincide, with respect to the Islamic State issue? To what extent, if any, do efforts by Iran to support Iraq's government and Shiite militia forces contradict or support those of the United States? Please answer with respect to Iran's policy of supporting the Asad regime in Syria?

What are the connections, if any, between this crisis and other key regional issues, such as international diplomacy on Iran's nuclear program and the ongoing Syria conflict? Should the United States seek or avoid an approach to the Iraq crisis that also involves these other issues?

To what extent will the governments of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey support anti-Islamic State entities in areas adjacent to their territory?

What might be the broader strategic implications of increased U.S. assistance to the current Iraqi government? What has been the reaction of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to increased U.S. support for the Iraqi

government, which the Gulf leaders assert is closely aligned with Iran? How might Iran respond?

How are Kurdish efforts to control Kirkuk and its energy resources likely to affect the security situation in that area generally and in Iraq specifically?

What is the likelihood that the Kurds will implement a formal secession from Iraq in the near future? How should these considerations affect U.S. policy toward the KRG?

Are changes to U.S. global counterterrorism policies and practices necessary in light of developments related to the Islamic State?

What are the humanitarian implications of the crisis? Please discuss the situation for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), particularly those displaced in the last several months. What are the most pressing assistance needs and priorities?

What are the challenges for an effective humanitarian response by the international community? How would you assess the international humanitarian operation so far?

What action is the U.S. government taking in support of international humanitarian efforts?

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Chapter 3

NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS^{*}

Lauren Ploch Blanchard

SUMMARY

Boko Haram, a violent Nigerian Islamist movement, has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in recent years, drawing on a narrative of resentment and vengeance for state abuses to elicit recruits and sympathizers. The group's April 2014 abduction of almost 300 schoolgirls has drawn international attention, including from the Obama Administration and Members of Congress. Periodic attacks against foreign targets in the region and growing evidence of ties to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a regional terrorist network affiliated with Al Qaeda, have also raised the concern of U.S. policy makers. The State Department named several individuals linked to Boko Haram, including its leader, Abubakar Shekau, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2012, and Boko Haram was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S. State Department in November 2013. The Obama Administration does not currently consider Boko Haram to be an affiliate of Al Qaeda.

More than 5,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence, making it one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world. U.N. and Nigerian officials report that more than 6 million

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Nigerians have been affected by the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, and more than 300,000 have been displaced. The group has focused on a wide range of targets, but civilians in the impoverished, predominately Muslim northeast have borne the brunt of the violence. Nigeria's heavy-handed response to Boko Haram's insurgent and terrorist operations has also taken a toll on civilians and complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation with the Nigerian government, in spite of shared concerns about Boko Haram and its ties to regional and international terrorist groups and operatives. Coordination on counterterrorism efforts has also been hampered at times by a lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials.

U.S. policy toward Boko Haram reflects both the Administration's perception of the threat the group poses and the strategic importance of the U.S. relationship with Nigeria. At this point, Boko Haram appears to pose a threat primarily to stability in northern Nigeria, and potentially to surrounding areas in neighboring countries. Some of Boko Haram's attacks have targeted Christian communities in the north, threatening to fuel existing religious tensions in the country. The group also poses a threat to international targets, including Western citizens, in the region.

The Nigerian government has struggled to respond to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram. Multiple factors have constrained the Nigerian security force response, notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. By many accounts, Nigerian troops are not adequately resourced or equipped to counter the insurgency. The government has been criticized in domestic and international press reports for what has been widely perceived as a slow response to the abduction of the schoolgirls in April, and to offers of international assistance in support of the investigation and possible rescue efforts. To date, it remains unclear to what extent Nigerian officials are cooperating with foreign advisors and experts, including those from the United States.

Some Members of Congress have engaged in deliberations with the Administration for several years about the extent to which Boko Haram poses a threat to the United States. Legislation was introduced in both the 112th and 113th Congresses to press the State Department to designate the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. More recently, some Members expressed support through various public statements and correspondence for efforts to find and rescue the abducted schoolgirls, including a letter to President Obama signed by all 20 female Senators that urged further sanctions on the group. Related legislation includes S.Res. 433 and H.Res. 573.

OVERVIEW

The United States has offered support to the government of Nigeria to investigate and facilitate the release of almost 300 female students who were abducted from their school in northern Nigeria in April by Boko Haram, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The case has attracted extensive international attention, driven in part by public rallies and a social media campaign known on Twitter by the slogan *#BringBackOurGirls*. Many Members of Congress have expressed outrage at the kidnappings, calling on the Nigerian government to more urgently and effectively respond and urging the Obama Administration to facilitate the girls' safe return. More broadly, the abduction has raised questions about what steps the Nigerian government, the United States, and others have taken to counter the rising threat posed by Boko Haram, and what impact Nigeria's years-long counterinsurgency campaign has had on the group.

The kidnapping is among the latest in a series of atrocities and terrorist attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in an escalating campaign aimed, in part, at undermining the Nigerian government's control over the northern part of the country. Nigeria's heavy-handed response to Boko Haram's insurgent and terrorist operations has complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation with the Nigerian government, in spite of shared concerns about Boko Haram and its ties to regional and international terrorist groups and operatives. Security sector corruption and mismanagement have also reportedly hampered the Nigerian response. Congress and Obama Administration officials continue to weigh additional options for responding to the mass abduction, while also seeking to strengthen U.S.-Nigerian security relations in a manner that will curtail Boko Haram's violent campaign. This report explores several questions that have been often asked in relation to the group, the impact of its attacks, and the response of the Nigerian government and other international actors, including the United States.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What Is Boko Haram?

Boko Haram emerged in the early 2000s as a small Sunni Islamic sect advocating a strict interpretation and implementation of Islamic law for

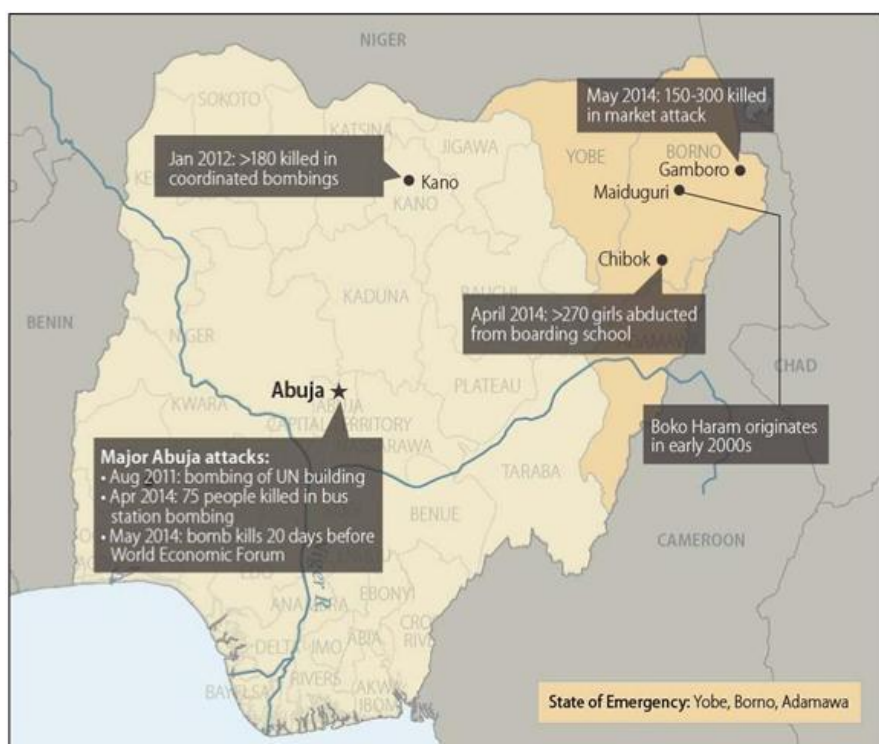
Nigeria. Calling itself *Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al Jihad* (roughly translated from Arabic as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"), the group is more popularly known as Boko Haram (often translated as "Western education is forbidden"), a nickname given by local Hausa-speaking communities to describe the group's view that Western education and culture have been corrupting influences that are *haram* ("forbidden") under its conservative interpretation of Islam.¹

While the sect's leadership did not initially call for violence, its followers engaged in periodic skirmishes with police during its formative years. At that time the group's activities were limited in scope and contained within several highly impoverished states in the predominately Muslim northeast.² In July 2009, at least 700 people were killed during an effort by Nigerian security forces to suppress the group. In the course of that violence, the group's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic young cleric who had studied in Saudi Arabia, was killed in police custody. The group subsequently appeared to dissipate, but reemerged a year later under new leadership, orchestrating a large prison break in September 2010 that freed hundreds, including its own members. Some Boko Haram militants may have fled to insurgent training camps in the Sahel in 2009-2010. The group has built ties with transnational extremist groups in the region, which have reportedly provided training and increasingly sophisticated weaponry. Boko Haram attacks since 2011 have featured improvised explosive devices (IEDs), car bombs, and, periodically, suicide attacks, but fighters also continue to inflict a heavy toll using small arms and arson.

By many accounts, Boko Haram is not a monolithic organization. Beyond its core militants, who appear to ascribe to a violent Sunni extremist ideology, the group appears to draw support from a broader group of followers, predominantly young men from the northeast. Experts speculate that the group's supporters may be driven by frustration with perceived disparities in the application of laws (including *sharia*); the lack of development, jobs, and investment in the north;³ and/or the abusive response of security forces in the region.⁴ It is widely rumored that certain northern Nigerian politicians may have provided support and/or funding to the group in its early years.

The State Department estimates the number of Boko Haram fighters in the hundreds to low thousands.⁵ The group's organizational structure is often described as diffuse (increasingly so since the death of Yusuf). Some analysts suggest that it is susceptible to fracturing—there are apparent disagreements over tactics and the group's civilian death toll. Like Al Shabaab, an Islamist insurgent group in Somalia, some Boko Haram leaders appear focused on

building ties with “core” Al Qaeda and affiliated groups and pursuing a transnational agenda, while others remain focused exclusively on a domestic insurgency. It is unclear to what extent the group’s leader, Abubakar Shekau, exerts operational control over its various cells. The emergence of a more internationally-focused splinter faction, Ansaru, in early 2012 contributed to speculation about leadership divisions. In its public statements, Ansaru has been critical of the killing of Nigerian Muslims under Shekau’s leadership. The splinter group appears to have focused its attacks on foreigners in Nigeria and neighboring countries, primarily through kidnappings, and has been blamed for the deaths of several European hostages.⁶



Source: Graphic created by CRS. Map borders and cities generated by Hannah Fischer using data from Department of State and Esri (both 2013) and the National Geographic Intelligence Agency (2014).

Figure 1. Boko Haram’s Increasing Impact on Northeast Nigeria.

What Is the Impact of Boko Haram Violence and Who Are Its Victims?

More than 5,000 people have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence. U.N. and Nigerian officials report that more than 6 million Nigerians have been affected and more than 300,000 have been displaced.⁷ The group has focused on a wide range of targets, but civilians in the impoverished Muslim northeast have borne the brunt of the violence.

Boko Haram's leaders have called in their public rhetoric for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity.⁸ Attacks attributed to the group have not exclusively, or even primarily, targeted Christians, who are a minority in the north, and the group has yet to conduct attacks against the majority-Christian southern part of the country. Religious figures and institutions comprised an estimated 10% of the group's targets from 2009 to 2013,⁹ but its assaults on churches have nevertheless fueled existing religious tensions in Nigeria.¹⁰ These attacks, which often occur on Sundays or religious holidays, presumably to achieve maximum effect, have in some cases sparked deadly reprisal attacks by Christians against Muslim civilians. The church bombings, along with the recent spate of kidnappings and other high-profile civilian attacks, appear to be part of a deliberate effort to foment instability, possibly seeking to discredit and delegitimize the national government by exposing the weakness of its security apparatus and justice mechanisms and, potentially, to ignite a religious war.

Boko Haram's attacks have increased substantially in frequency, reach, and lethality since 2010, occurring almost daily in parts of northeast Nigeria, and periodically beyond.¹¹ In May 2013, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in response to the escalating violence, expanding a state of emergency that had been declared in Borno and Yobe in late 2011 (see **Figure 1**). Boko Haram initially focused primarily on state and federal targets, such as police stations, but it has also targeted civilians in schools, churches, mosques, markets, bars, and villages. Cell phone towers and media outlets have also been attacked, likely for both tactical and ideological reasons. The group has assassinated local political leaders and moderate Muslim clerics. Its deadliest attacks include a coordinated series of bombings in Kano, northern Nigeria's largest city, that killed more than 180 people in January 2012; an attack on the village of Benisheikh in September 2013 that killed more than 160 civilians; and an assault on another northeastern village, Gamboro, that may have killed more than 300 people in early May 2014.

In August 2011, a Boko Haram suicide bomber attacked a U.N. building in capital, Abuja, killing more than 20 people and injuring over 80. It was the group's first lethal attack on a foreign target. It was also the group's first clearly intentional suicide bombing. Boko Haram spokesmen claimed in press reports that the U.N. attack was retribution for the state's harsh security response against its members, referencing U.S. and international "collaboration" with the Nigerian security forces.

Boko Haram attacks against soft targets, and associated fighting between militants and security forces, have extracted a heavy toll on Nigeria's northeast. Few relief agencies are present in the remote area, given the risk of attack or kidnapping, and thousands of displaced people have little access to food, clean water, or healthcare. The conflict has also disrupted farming, limited the transit of basic goods to local markets, and deterred investment. Efforts by various interlocutors to facilitate negotiations between the government and Boko Haram have been unsuccessful. Human rights advocates have urged Nigerian security forces to improve efforts to protect civilians as they conduct their offensive against the militants, which has pushed more than 60,000 refugees across the border into Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.¹²

What Is Known About the Kidnapping of the Nigerian Schoolgirls?

The abducted schoolgirls are high school seniors, mostly ages 16 to 18, who had assembled to take their final exams at Chibok Government Girls Secondary School. The government had closed all public secondary schools in the northeastern state of Borno in March in response to the threat of attacks by Boko Haram. While most of the girls regularly attended the public boarding school in Chibok, students from other schools that remained closed had also gathered for the exams, which complicated initial efforts to determine how many girls had been taken by the gunmen. The attack occurred overnight between April 14 and 15. Boko Haram fighters, reportedly numbering more than 200, overpowered security forces based in the town (local police and 17 soldiers). According to Amnesty International, the main headquarters of the army division tasked with countering Boko Haram, located 80 miles away in the state capital Maiduguri, received warning of the pending attack hours before it happened, but did not deploy forces to prevent it.¹³ According to press reports, just over 50 of the girls were able to escape during or shortly after the incident.¹⁴ The whereabouts of those still being held captive are

unclear, although the Nigerian military announced on May 26 that they had identified the location of at least some of the girls. Some observers speculate that they may have been taken to the Sambisa forest (a reserve used as a refuge by the group) or to a remote mountainous area on the Cameroon border.¹⁵

A video released by Boko Haram on May 12 shows a group of about 130 girls, many of whom were subsequently identified as abductees, in conservative Muslim dress in an unidentified rural location. This may indicate that the girls have been split into groups to frustrate rescue attempts. The video shows the girls holding Korans and praying. In it, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, who had threatened to sell the girls as slaves or brides in a previous video, announced that the girls, most of whom were Christian, had been converted to Islam and suggested that they would be released if Boko Haram fighters held by the government were freed.¹⁶

Are Attacks against Schools or Women a Common Tactic?

Since 2012, Boko Haram has increasingly claimed responsibility for setting fire to schools and attacking universities in northern Nigeria.¹⁷ Initial attacks appeared to focus primarily on property destruction, occurring mostly at night when the schools were empty. But in 2013 the group's assaults became more brutal, increasingly targeting students and teachers. In July 2013, Boko Haram's leader publicly threatened to burn secular schools and kill their teachers, describing the schools as a "plot against Islam."¹⁸ The threat has deterred thousands of children from attending school in a region that already had low attendance rates and literacy levels, especially among women and girls. National statistics show huge disparities within Nigeria in the percentage of girls who attend school, with attendance lowest in the north. In response to the Chibok attack and the broader impact of Boko Haram violence on school attendance, the Nigerian government and international aid agencies, under the leadership of U.N. Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), launched a Safe Schools Initiative in late May 2014, with more than \$23 million in initial donor pledges.

The Chibok kidnapping is also not the first time Boko Haram has abducted women. In May 2013, the group released a video announcing that it had taken women and children hostage in response to the arrest of its members' wives and children. That incident was followed by a prisoner/hostage exchange. According to press reports, the kidnapping of Christian women in the north by Boko Haram members became an increasing

trend in 2013. Victims of previous abductions have reportedly been forced to convert to Islam and have been used as sex slaves by fighters.¹⁹

To What Extent Does Boko Haram Pose a Threat to Neighboring Countries, and What Is the Regional Response?

Boko Haram has focused its attacks to date predominately on northeast Nigeria, although several kidnappings of Western citizens in neighboring Cameroon have been attributed to the group and/or to Ansaru.²⁰ Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have all nevertheless felt the impact of Boko Haram's activities—together, the three countries are host to more than 60,000 refugees who have fled Nigeria. Additionally, the threat of kidnappings and attacks affects local economies, and officials have expressed concern that Boko Haram may be transiting through or recruiting among border communities.²¹ Boko Haram fighters have also reportedly used remote border areas as a refuge from Nigerian offensives. In 2012, Boko Haram fighters reportedly operated alongside, and received training from, Islamist insurgents in northern Mali affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), after a major Nigerian military crackdown on the group's operations.²²

According to the State Department, Nigeria's neighbors have limited military and law enforcement capacity to secure their borders or respond to extremist threats, but significant political will to do so.²³ Governments in the region have reportedly created a multinational joint task force to coordinate their security response to Boko Haram, although details on the composition of the task force and its efforts to date are limited.²⁴ There have been several reported clashes between suspected Boko Haram fighters and Cameroonian security forces. In late May, Cameroon announced the deployment of an additional 1,000 special forces to the northern border region. The first official report of a direct Boko Haram clash with forces from Niger appears to have occurred on May 6, when a Nigerien army patrol was reportedly ambushed near the city of Diffa. Alleged Boko Haram members have also been arrested in Niger, some reportedly participated in a prison-break in Niger in June 2013 that freed Islamist militants.²⁵

Does Boko Haram Have Ties to Al Qaeda or Other International Jihadist Groups and Does the Group Pose a Threat to the United States or U.S. Interests?

The increasing lethality and sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks have raised its profile among U.S. national security officials. In February 2013, the State Department designated the group, along with its splinter faction, Ansaru, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).²⁶ Boko Haram currently appears to pose a threat primarily to local stability in Nigeria and to state and international targets, including Western citizens, in the region. Boko Haram's leader has issued direct threats against the United States, but to date no American citizens are known to have been kidnapped or killed by the group.²⁷ In March 2014, the commander of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) reiterated the U.S. military's assessment of the group's focus as primarily "a local effort," in comparison to the regional operations of groups in North Africa and the transnational focus of Al Shabaab in Somalia.²⁸ Boko Haram's ties to other extremist groups and the focus by some of its members on pursuing a transnational agenda have amplified policy makers' concerns, however. The U.S. Director of National Intelligence has warned that the decentralization of the Al Qaeda movement "has led to the emergence of new power centers and an increase in threats by networks of like-minded extremists with allegiances to multiple groups."²⁹

Ties between Boko Haram and another FTO, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a regional criminal and terrorist network operating in the Sahel and North Africa, appear to be of particular concern.³⁰ The Obama Administration does not currently consider Boko Haram to be affiliated with Al Qaeda's central leadership, despite periodic rhetorical pledges of solidarity and support for Al Qaeda and its affiliates from Shekau.³¹ U.S. military officials have identified Boko Haram as a "threat to Western interests" in the region for several years, referencing indications in 2013 that the group and AQIM were "likely sharing funds, training, and explosive materials," and suggesting that "there are elements of Boko Haram that aspire to a broader regional level of attacks, to include not just in Africa, but Europe and aspirationally to the United States."³² The commander of U.S. Special Operations Command reiterated this concern in February 2014, stating "we see Boko Haram beginning to conflate with AQIM in North Africa."³³ There has been speculation for years that Boko Haram may have acquired weapons from former Libyan stockpiles through AQIM ties.³⁴ The State Department identified two of three individuals linked to Boko Haram—Khalid al Barnawi

and Abubakar Adam Kamar—who were named in June 2012 as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), as having close links to AQIM. (Kamar was reportedly killed in 2012.) Barnawi is purportedly a leader of the splinter faction, Ansaru, which the International Crisis Group has described as “Nigeria’s Al Qaeda franchise.”³⁵

The rise in kidnappings by Ansaru and Boko Haram of Western and other foreign citizens may be an indication of AQIM influence. AQIM has long been associated with kidnappings, and one of its splinter factions was responsible for the 2013 In Amenas hostage crisis in Algeria, in which 38 hostages were killed, including three Americans.³⁶ Several foreign hostages have been killed in captivity, and the deaths of several hostages during failed rescue attempts in the region, including those conducted by European special operations forces, highlight the challenges facing security forces as they consider options for rescuing the abducted schoolgirls.³⁷

In addition to Boko Haram’s links to AQIM and its affiliated groups, some members of Boko Haram reportedly may have received training from the Somali terrorist group Al Shabaab in East Africa. Mamman Nur, purported to be one of the ideological leaders of the Ansaru faction, is rumored to have links to the Somali group, as well as to AQIM, the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and other Al Qaeda affiliates. By some accounts, Nur may have been behind the 2011 U.N. bombing in Abuja.³⁸

More broadly, the recruitment of Nigerians by transnational terrorist groups other than Boko Haram continues to be of concern to U.S. officials. The recent prosecution of a Nigerian national, Lawal Olaniyi Babafemi, in a U.S. federal court for providing material support to AQAP, does not appear to be directly connected to Boko Haram. Babafemi, who had been extradited from Nigeria, pled guilty in April to participating in AQAP media and recruitment campaigns aimed at attracting English-speaking Nigerian recruits. In January, a U.S. appeals court upheld the conviction and life sentence of another Nigerian AQAP recruit, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who pled guilty in 2011 to the attempted bombing of a Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas 2009. There has been no evidence linking Abdulmutallab to Boko Haram.

How Is the Nigerian Government Responding?

Since Boko Haram’s resurgence in 2010, the Nigerian government has struggled to respond to the growing threat posed by the group, and its expanding impact on the civilian population in the northeast. Nigerian security

forces have been deployed in counterterrorism operations in the most affected states since 2011—their offensives against the group had some notable successes in 2012 and early 2013, temporarily reducing attacks, but the past year has been the deadliest for civilians in the group’s history. Some local communities formed informant networks and vigilante groups in 2013 to protect themselves, in part due to reportedly ineffective responses by security forces. In Borno, these groups have reportedly worked with the state government and security forces to rout Boko Haram cells. Press reports suggest that the groups, who collectively call themselves the “Civilian Joint Task Force” or Civilian-JTF, have had some positive impact on security in the Borno state capital of Maiduguri in the past year, but Boko Haram attacks in rural areas, which are sometimes claimed as retaliation against locals for their cooperation with security forces, have been increasingly lethal.³⁹ By many accounts, these civilian groups have sought to work with the Nigerian military to reduce the possibility of indiscriminate abuses against innocent civilians in the context of counterterrorism operations (see below).

The Nigerian parliament passed anti-terrorism legislation, originally introduced in 2011, in 2013. The law was designed, in part, to facilitate greater counterterrorism coordination, but interagency cooperation and information sharing remains limited. According to the State Department, the Nigerian government has made little progress in addressing broader grievances among northern populations that may fuel Boko Haram support—state government efforts to increase education and employment opportunities have had almost no support from the federal government.

Multiple factors have constrained the ability of the Nigerian security forces to counter the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, most notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. According to the State Department’s 2013 terrorism report, among the various dynamics limiting the government’s response to Boko Haram are a lack of coordination and cooperation between Nigerian security agencies; corruption; misallocation of resources; limited requisite databases; the slow pace of the judicial system; and lack of sufficient training for prosecutors and judges to implement anti-terrorism laws. Soldiers, particularly in the northeast, reportedly suffer from low morale, struggling to keep pace with a foe that is reportedly increasingly well-armed and trained. By many accounts troops are not adequately resourced or equipped to counter an insurgency, despite a security budget totaling almost \$5.8 billion.⁴⁰ In the assessment of DOD officials, Nigerian funding for the military is “skimmed off the top,” and Nigerian troops are “showing signs of real fear,” and becoming “afraid to even engage.”⁴¹

While Nigerian security force offensives have taken a significant toll on Boko Haram's leadership and, at times, on its fighting strength, the Nigerian forces have also suffered heavy losses in Boko Haram attacks.⁴² In the face of international criticism and a recent Boko Haram ambush that left several soldiers dead, reports circulated in mid-May 2014 of a mutiny by troops in the army's Seventh Division, which is deployed in the northeast to counter Boko Haram. The commander of the division (whom troops reportedly shot at) was subsequently replaced, on May 16, amid allegations that that he had repeatedly failed to act on information related to Boko Haram threats.

The Nigerian government has been criticized in domestic and international press reports for what has widely been perceived as a slow response to the Chibok abductions, and to offers of international assistance in support of the investigation and possible rescue efforts.⁴³ Official government spokespeople have issued conflicting accounts of the Chibok incident and the government's response to it, attracting further negative attention.

On May 10, the Nigerian Defense Ministry announced that two divisions of the military had been stationed in the border region near Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, where they will coordinate with their regional counterparts to track the girls. (Apparent shortfalls in regional intelligence-sharing and interoperability, which stem from a lack of capacity, political tensions, and historic factors, are a key challenge.) As part of this effort, the Nigerian Air Force has reportedly flown at least 250 sorties.⁴⁴ Many experts suggest that, even with good intelligence on the location of the girls, rescue operations would be extremely dangerous, and argue that a negotiated release of the hostages would be preferable. While the Nigerian government has reportedly accepted foreign offers of assistance in response to the kidnappings, it remains unclear how quickly and to what extent Nigerian officials are cooperating with foreign advisors and experts. Various additional factors that may inhibit the Nigerian response are outlined below.

What Is U.S. Policy Toward Boko Haram?

As noted above, Obama Administration officials have viewed Boko Haram primarily as a locally-focused, but potentially regional extremist threat in West Africa. U.S. policy toward the group is guided by an assessment of the extent to which it poses a direct threat to the United States and U.S. interests, and is also influenced by U.S.-Nigeria relations. Other terrorist threats on the continent have demanded greater attention and resources from the United

States—Al Shabaab, in Somalia, continues to be ranked by Administration officials as the primary terrorist threat in Africa, although extremist groups in North Africa and the Sahel have been viewed as an increasing threat in recent years.⁴⁵ The State Department designated three individuals linked to Boko Haram as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) in June 2012, including Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, and in June 2013 it issued a \$7 million reward for information on the location of Shekau through its Rewards for Justice program.⁴⁶ In November 2013, the State Department designated Boko Haram and Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs; see below). International attention to Boko Haram's abduction of the young women in Chibok elevated the group's status among U.S. policy makers in May 2014, and the U.S. government has deployed additional resources to the region to support Nigerian efforts to counter the group.

Successive U.S. Administrations have viewed Nigeria, a top recipient of U.S. foreign aid, as a critically strategic country on the African continent. It is Africa's largest economy and its most populous country, with almost 180 million people, roughly divided between Muslims and Christians. Its Muslim population is among the world's largest. The Nigerian government is an influential actor in African politics, and the country holds a rotating seat on the U.N. Security Council in 2014-2015. In early 2014, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, outlined various threats facing the country, including "critical terrorism threats from Boko Haram and persistent extremism in the north, simmering ethno-religious conflict ... and militants who are capable of remobilizing in the Niger Delta and attacking the oil industry." Clapper also warned about "rising political tensions and violent internal conflict" in the lead-up to the country's 2015 election, warning that "protests and upheaval, especially in northern Nigeria, are likely in the event of President Goodluck Jonathan's reelection."⁴⁷

Many U.S. officials, while stressing the importance of the U.S.-Nigeria relationship and the gravity of security threats within and emanating from the country, remain concerned about reported abuses by Nigerian security services, and about the government's limited efforts to address perceived impunity for such abuses. For their part, Nigerian officials reportedly remain wary of perceived U.S. interference in internal affairs and dismissive of certain training offers. These factors appear to have constrained security cooperation, despite shared concerns over terrorism and other regional security threats.⁴⁸

Despite concerns about Nigeria's counterterrorism approach to date, the Obama Administration has committed, through a formal dialogue mechanism known as the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC), initiated in 2010, to

support Nigerian efforts to increase public confidence in the military and police to respond more effectively to the extremist threat.⁴⁹ In addition to USAID programs to counter radicalization in Nigeria, the State Department and the Department of Defense (DOD) have deliberated in recent months on how best to ensure a shift by Nigeria to “an integrated civilian-security-focused strategy to counter Boko Haram and Ansaru in a manner that adheres to the rule of law and ensures accountability.”⁵⁰

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield has urged the Nigerian government to take a more “holistic” approach to terrorism, suggesting that regional and socioeconomic disparities have contributed to Boko Haram recruitment. She suggests that the Nigerian response should incorporate efforts not only to degrade the group’s capacity, but also to provide justice and ensure accountability “in instances where government officials and security forces violate those [human] rights,” in part to “diminish Boko Haram’s appeal and legitimacy” among would-be recruits.⁵¹ More generally, U.S. officials have for years urged the Nigerian government to more actively address widespread under-development and poverty in the north.

What Assistance Has the United States Provided to Nigeria to Help It Counter the Boko Haram Threat?

U.S.-Nigerian diplomatic engagement has focused on the Boko Haram threat through a Regional Security Working Group of the Binational Commission, as well as through regular engagement by U.S. embassy officials in Abuja. Through the BNC dialogue, the United States has supported Nigerian efforts to establish a joint intelligence fusion center; the FBI has also provided periodic support to the Nigerian government to assist in specific incident investigations. The United States has provided counterterrorism training and assistance to Nigerian civilian and law enforcement agencies, but counterterrorism support for the Nigerian military has been limited in comparison with that provided to some countries in the Sahel and East Africa. U.S. military assistance to Nigeria has focused primarily on professionalization, peacekeeping support and training, and border and maritime security. The country has received sizable assistance to support the Nigerian military’s peacekeeping deployments through the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI), totaling \$2 million to \$3 million annually in recent years. Nigeria also receives on average \$1 million annually

in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), which has been used to sustain the country's fleet of C-130 aircraft. Nigerian security forces have received counternarcotics assistance from the State Department and DOD.

U.S. counterterrorism programs in Nigeria are implemented through the State Department's West Africa Regional Security Initiative (WARSI), the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and other State Department-led initiatives, including Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) and the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI), as well as through DOD funds for counterterrorism and military-to-military cooperation activities.⁵² Nigerian law enforcement agencies receive ATA and RSI training regularly totaling more than \$3 million per year, focusing on border security, crisis response, counter-IED, and investigative and analytic capacity. Counterterrorism assistance to the military is increasing—FY2014 assistance includes \$5 million in counter-IED and civil-military relations training, and U.S. military trainers have recently begun efforts to train a ranger battalion. Some U.S. assistance for Nigerian military and police units has been restricted based on human rights concerns (see below).

The State Department and USAID additionally support programs that focus on countering radicalization in Nigeria. Other counterterrorism-related support includes justice sector programming focused on improving Nigerian capacity to prosecute terrorist financing cases.

How Is the United States Responding to the Abduction of the Schoolgirls?

The Obama Administration, with support from many Members of Congress, has offered support to Nigerian efforts to find and rescue the young women abducted from Chibok. According to Secretary of State John Kerry, "the kidnapping of hundreds of children by Boko Haram is an unconscionable crime, and we will do everything possible to support the Nigerian government to return these young women to their homes and to hold the perpetrators to justice."⁵³ On May 6, 2014, Secretary Kerry announced that he had spoken with the Nigerian president on behalf of President Obama and offered American support for the Nigerian response. That offer, which had been mentioned by the White House press secretary on May 5, is part of ongoing diplomatic and programmatic engagement with the Nigerian government to support efforts to counter the Boko Haram threat. The extent to which the

Jonathan Administration, or Nigerian military officials, have accepted various types of U.S. assistance is uncertain.

Following Secretary Kerry's remarks, the United States deployed a multi-disciplinary, interagency team to Abuja to provide support to Nigerian efforts to find and rescue the abducted schoolgirls. The interagency team adds to existing support already provided by U.S. Embassy Abuja and DOD. Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Sarah Sewall and AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez traveled to Abuja in mid-May for meetings with senior Nigerian officials to discuss cooperation on the response. The interagency team includes advisors to the government and its military counterparts. They will offer assistance on law enforcement best practices, hostage negotiations, assistance to victims, forensics and investigations, gathering and analyzing intelligence, using imagery, conducting strategic communications, and other aid.⁵⁴ A USAID component will also engage civil society on longer-term efforts to enhance civilian security, including the development of early warning networks and strategies to promote defections. The U.S. military contribution includes 16 uniformed military personnel who will advise and assist the Nigerians with communications, logistics, and intelligence. White House and DOD officials have emphasized that they are not currently considering the deployment of U.S. forces to directly participate in rescue operations.⁵⁵

On May 10, First Lady Michelle Obama delivered the President's Weekly Radio Address, stressing in the context of a Mother's Day message that the situation in Nigeria was "of great significance" to her, and reiterating that the President had directed U.S. agencies "to do everything possible to support the Nigerian government's efforts to find these girls and bring them home." U.S. officials have since indicated that the United States is providing commercial satellite data and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support to Nigeria's military,⁵⁶ and the two governments reached an intelligence sharing agreement in mid-May, although Administration officials indicate that the United States is not sharing raw intelligence with the Nigerian military. On May 21, President Obama notified Congress, "consistent with the War Powers Act, that he was deploying approximately 80 U.S. military personnel to neighboring Chad "as part of the U.S. efforts to locate and support the safe return" of the schoolgirls, "in furtherance of U.S. national security and foreign policy interests."⁵⁷ The notification indicated that the personnel would specifically support the operation of unmanned surveillance aircraft operating over northern Nigeria and the surrounding area.

Various operational and political challenges may continue to complicate U.S.-Nigerian cooperation, not least of which may be the question of whether there is sufficient Nigerian political will to accept foreign assistance that could be perceived as impinging on the country's sovereignty. In considering any proposals for more extensive and public U.S. involvement, U.S. officials may weigh whether U.S. action could provoke Boko Haram and further endanger the schoolgirls, and/or enhance the group's stature among other extremist groups, recruits, and potential financial backers.

What Are the Major Factors Constraining Further U.S. Assistance to Nigerian Security Forces in Their Operations against Boko Haram?

Human rights concerns have constrained U.S. security assistance to Nigeria for both legal and policy reasons, and coordination on counterterrorism efforts has also been hampered at times by a lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials. U.S. legal provisions, popularly known as the Leahy Laws, that prohibit assistance to foreign security force units implicated in gross violations of human rights have had a significant impact on U.S.-Nigerian security cooperation.⁵⁸ DOD officials have further described Nigeria as “an extremely challenging partner to work with,” and “slow to adapt with new strategies, new doctrines, and new tactics.”⁵⁹

Nigerian security forces have been accused of committing serious human rights abuses in the context of their operations against Boko Haram. The State Department's 2013 human rights report documents numerous “arbitrary or unlawful killings” by security forces, including “summary executions, assaults, torture, and other abuses” under the auspices of security operations in the northeast.⁶⁰ By some accounts, these abuses are not isolated incidents but part of a set of informal rules of engagement that are condoned by the government. Amnesty International has reported that thousands of people suspected of links to Boko Haram have been extra-judicially executed or unlawfully killed by security forces, and thousands of suspects have died in military or police custody.⁶¹ Allegations of torture by the Nigerian security forces in the context of counterterrorism operations in the northeast have become increasingly common.

In the past decade, the Nigerian government has deployed special combined military and police units known as Joint Task Forces (JTFs) to respond to specific conflicts that the government classifies as national

emergencies.⁶² Forces deployed to counter Islamist militants in the northeast under a JTF known as "Operation Restore Order" have been implicated in a range of abuses that have significantly complicated U.S.-Nigerian security cooperation. In April 2013, for example, more than 180 people were killed in fighting between security forces and suspected Boko Haram militants in the village of Baga, according to the Nigerian Red Cross and local officials; among the dead were reportedly innocent bystanders, including children.⁶³ Military officials disputed the number of casualties. Multiple human rights groups have implicated the JTF in mass arrests during raids in response to Boko Haram attacks, alleging that civilians are often held in military detention facilities for lengthy periods without charge or due process.

The Nigerian government ostensibly disbanded the JTF in August 2013, replacing it with the army's Seventh Division as the umbrella command for joint security operations. The State Department reports that many of the commanders and units remained the same, and the joint forces operating in the region continued to be referred to in the press as the JTF. A reported effort by Boko Haram gunmen to free prisoners held at Giwa military barracks in the Borno capital, Maiduguri, in March 2014 brought renewed international attention to the large number of detainees held by the military. During that incident, Amnesty International estimates that more than 620 people, including attackers and unarmed detainees, were killed by the military.⁶⁴

The United States is not the only donor government that has restricted security assistance based on human rights concerns; the United Kingdom, once a major provider of training and equipment to the Nigerian military, has significantly reduced its assistance in recent years, and the sale of lethal weapons to Nigeria is now prohibited under UK law.⁶⁵

Nigerian officials have acknowledged some abuses by security forces in the context of the fight against Boko Haram, but few security personnel have been prosecuted.⁶⁶ In May 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that he had raised human rights issues with Nigeria's foreign minister, and that they had "talked directly about the imperative of Nigerian troops adhering to the highest standards and not themselves engaging in atrocities or in human rights violations."⁶⁷ President Obama, prior to a bilateral meeting with President Jonathan in New York in September 2013, referred to Boko Haram as "one of the most vicious terrorist organizations in the world." He noted, "We want to be cooperative in that process of building capacity inside Nigeria to deal with that terrorist threat, but doing so in a way that is consistent with human rights. Because we strongly believe that the best way to undermine the agenda of

those who would do violence is to make sure that governments are responsive to the needs of people and following rule of law.”⁶⁸

In March 2014, following the Giwa barracks incident, Nigeria’s National Security Advisor, Mohammed Sambo Dasuki, unveiled a new “soft approach” strategy to countering the insurgency.⁶⁹ As part of the strategy, Dasuki announced the creation of a new Counter Terrorism Center in his office and outlined new measures to improve coordination between the federal, state, and local governments, as well as new counter-radicalization efforts and prison reforms.

One of the primary aims of DOD engagement is to “convince the Nigerians to change their tactics, techniques, and procedures toward Boko Haram,” and toward that end the U.S. military team deployed to Nigeria will seek to analyze the Nigerian operations and identify gaps for which international experts can provide assistance.⁷⁰ The DOD team includes several U.S. military advisors who were recently deployed in Central Africa to help regional forces, primarily from Uganda, counter the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), another brutal group that has long terrorized civilians.⁷¹ As in the counter-LRA operations, for which the United States has provided military advisors, logistical support, equipment, and ISR assets, the U.S. team could provide advice that might help the Nigerians act on intelligence about Boko Haram movements. At the same time, DOD officials indicate they are being “exceedingly cautious when it comes to sharing information with the Nigerians because of their unfortunate record” and have sought assurances from Nigerian officials that they would use any shared U.S. intelligence “in a manner consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law.”⁷²

What Assistance Is the United States Providing to Neighboring Countries to Help Them Contain and Respond to the Boko Haram?

The United States has provided significant counterterrorism assistance to several countries in the Sahel, including Nigeria’s northern neighbor, Niger, as part of the State Department’s Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), its DOD component, Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS), and bilateral assistance programs, notably DOD’s “Section 1206” train-and-equip program and regular joint combined exchange training (JCETs) and exercises. These efforts have primarily focused on countering the threat posed by AQIM and affiliated groups. Niger has been a significant

recipient of Section 1206 funds, totaling almost \$35 million since FY2012. In February 2013, the Administration reported to Congress the deployment of about 100 U.S. military personnel to Niger's capital, Niamey, to manage a new base for unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles.⁷³ The reported focus of that surveillance has been northern Mali.⁷⁴ Cameroon recently became the newest member of TSCTP (which already included Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, among other countries) because of the growing regional threat posed by Boko Haram. State Department and DOD officials are currently planning a new security initiative that would focus on the four countries most affected by Boko Haram. The State Department has also allocated TSCTP resources for counter-radicalization programs in northern Cameroon and Niger.

What Other Assistance Does the United States Provide to Nigeria?

Nigeria routinely ranks among the top recipients of U.S. bilateral foreign assistance in Africa. The United States is Nigeria's largest bilateral donor, providing roughly \$700 million annually in recent years. Strengthening governance, mitigating conflict, improving agricultural productivity and access to education and health services, promoting new jobs and increased supplies of clean energy, and professionalizing and reforming the security services have been the main areas of focus for U.S. support. According to the Administration's FY2015 bilateral aid request for Nigeria, which totals more than \$720 million, "The primary goal of U.S. foreign assistance to Nigeria is to mobilize key institutions to support a resilient, equitable, and better-governed nation." Of the total amount of aid requested for Nigeria, more than 87% is targeted at health programs. FY2014 bilateral funding totaled over \$702 million.

Nigeria is a focus country under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), both part of the Administration's Global Health Initiative (GHI; Nigeria would rank at the top of GHI recipients in the FY2015 request). Nigerian farmers benefit from agriculture programs under the President's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, Feed the Future (FTF), that focus on building partnerships with the private sector to expand local supplies and exports of staple foods and generate employment. Interventions to encourage private sector participation in trade and energy are also key components of the Administration's economic growth initiatives in the country. Despite being one of the world's largest oil

exporters, Nigeria faces major constraints to domestic power production, and the United States is providing significant support to the Nigerian government's efforts to increase the energy supply through various Power Africa investments.⁷⁵

In addition to being a major recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, Nigeria is the second largest destination for U.S. private investment in Africa, totaling roughly \$5 billion. Nigeria has regularly ranked among the United States' largest sources of imported oil. U.S. imports, which accounted for over 40% of Nigeria's total crude oil exports until 2012, made the United States Nigeria's largest trading partner, although U.S. purchases of Nigerian sweet crude dropped in 2012 and 2013 as domestic U.S. crude supply increased. Asian countries, notably India, which ranked second to the United States in 2012 as the largest market for Nigerian exports, have replaced much of the demand for Nigerian oil as U.S. imports have declined. Nigeria is eligible for U.S. trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act, as amended (AGOA). Nearly all of Nigeria's AGOA-eligible exports are petroleum products.

How Has Congress Responded to the Boko Haram Threat?

Many Members of Congress have engaged in deliberations with the Administration about the extent to which Boko Haram poses a threat to the United States for several years. In November 2011, the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence held the first congressional hearing on the group, and committee leadership have repeatedly raised concerns about the amount of information available on Boko Haram and the potential to underestimate its threat to U.S. interests.⁷⁶ The House Foreign Relations Subcommittees on Africa and on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade held a joint hearing on Boko Haram in November 2013. Legislation was introduced in both the 112th and 113th Congresses to press the State Department to designate the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (see below), and Congress directed the Director of National Intelligence to provide an assessment of the Boko Haram threat to Congress in the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA; P.L. 112-239).

Some Members of Congress have expressed support for efforts to find and rescue the young women abducted from Chibok in various public statements and correspondence to both President Obama and President Jonathan, including a letter signed by all 20 female Senators that urged further sanctions on the group. Related legislation includes S.Res. 433, which passed on May 6,

and H.Res. 573, which passed on May 20. These resolutions condemned Boko Haram's attacks on civilian targets and expressed support for the Nigerian people and the families of the abducted girls, for efforts to hold the group accountable, and for U.S. offers to assist in the search for the girls. The resolutions also encouraged efforts to strengthen initiatives to promote education and human rights in Nigeria.

How Does Boko Haram's Status As a Foreign Terrorist Organization Impact the U.S. Response to the Threat?

Deliberations within the U.S. government over whether to designate Boko Haram as an FTO concluded in November 2013, when the State Department designated both Boko Haram and Ansaru as FTOs under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) under Executive Order 13224 (2001). The FTO designations aim to assist U.S. and other law enforcement agencies in efforts to investigate and prosecute suspects associated with the group, and have been described by U.S. officials as an important step in supporting the Nigerian government's effort to address the threat.⁷⁷ The FTO designation triggers the freezing of any assets a group might have in U.S. financial institutions, bans FTO members' travel to the United States, and criminalizes transactions (including material support) with the organization or its members.

FTO status may serve to help prioritize greater U.S. security and intelligence resources toward a group, but this is not a legal requirement of the designation, and the Administration has not indicated what additional resources, if any, were focused on Boko Haram after the designation. The prioritization of such assets is based on intelligence assessments and policy direction from the Administration or authorizations and appropriations from Congress. An FTO designation does not convey statutory authorization for direct U.S. military action against a terrorist group.

It is unclear what impact, if any, the FTO designation may have had on Boko Haram financing—the extent to which they raise funds from abroad is unclear, and to date there have been no charges filed in U.S. courts related to support for the group. Boko Haram appears to fund its operations largely through criminal activity, including bank robberies, kidnapping for ransom, assassinations for hire, trafficking, and various types of extortion. According to press reports, Boko Haram may have been paid more than \$3 million in ransom for a French family that was kidnapped in northern Cameroon in

February 2013 and freed in April.⁷⁸ Cameroon also reportedly freed several Boko Haram detainees as part of that deal; however, France and Cameroon both deny that any ransom was paid. According to the State Department, Boko Haram does appear to receive funding from AQIM, and some experts suggest the group may get funds from groups in the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia through AQIM connections.⁷⁹

With ransom payments thought to contribute to Boko Haram's finances, the expansion of international sanctions against the group could have implications for its kidnapping operations. The Nigerian government formally designated Boko Haram and Ansaru as terrorist groups in 2013. The British government named Ansaru as a "Proscribed Terrorist Organization" in November 2012 (after the group kidnapped and murdered a British construction worker), describing it as broadly aligned with Al Qaeda, and designated Boko Haram as such in July 2013. Boko Haram was added to the U.N. Al Qaeda sanctions list on May 22, 2014, after the Nigerian government reversed its prior reservations about the group being listed.⁸⁰

Why Wasn't Boko Haram Designated As an FTO Earlier?

Some Members of Congress pressed for the designation of Boko Haram as an FTO for several years before the State Department decision was made, noting the growing threat posed by the group.⁸¹ Nigeria experts who opposed the designation argued that it would have few practical effects, given limited information suggesting material support for the group from individuals in U.S. jurisdiction, and they cautioned that a designation might actually serve as a recruitment and fundraising tool. Some global counterterrorism experts have made similar arguments about potential complications related to FTO designations, suggesting a designation could inadvertently give additional visibility and credibility to a group among international jihadists or could make the operations of U.S.-based relief agencies in Boko Haram areas more difficult.⁸²

Some experts have viewed Boko Haram's shift toward Christian targets as tactical—part of an effort to elicit a stronger response from President Jonathan (a Christian from the southern Niger Delta region) and other southern politicians, or from Western governments. Some of those experts have cautioned U.S. policy makers to avoid taking positions that might fuel perceptions that the United States is "taking sides" between Christians and Muslims in the country.⁸³ Some also argued that an FTO designation might be

seen, by both the Nigerian government and the northern population, as an endorsement by the United States of “excessive use of force at a time when the rule of law in Nigeria hangs in the balance.”⁸⁴ These concerns were shared by State Department officials, according to former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson.⁸⁵ State Department deliberations were also influenced by Nigerian government concerns about the possible impact of a designation.⁸⁶

State Department officials have also stated that, in the course of the extensive interagency process involved in making the determination, they sought to “deepen [their] understanding of the organization,” suggesting that Boko Haram’s “decentralized and factionalized” nature, with its “loose command-and-control structure,” complicated the process.⁸⁷ Reports suggest that security restrictions on travel by U.S. embassy personnel to large parts of northern Nigeria hindered the mission’s ability to maintain contacts and may also have limited State Department reporting.⁸⁸

How Have Others in the International Community Responded to the Abductions?

On May 9, 2014, the U.N. Security Council issued a press statement expressing outrage at the abduction of the Nigerian school girls and demanding their release. The Security Council also condemned a May 5 Boko Haram attack on Gamboru, a remote village near the Nigeria-Cameroon border, in which between 150 and 300 people were reportedly killed. The Council expressed “deep concern” with terrorist attacks committed by the group since 2009, which “represent a threat to peace and stability in West and Central Africa.” The Council noted that it would consider “appropriate measures” against Boko Haram, and as noted above, the Security Council subsequently approved the addition of Boko Haram to the Al Qaeda sanctions list in late May, making the group subject to an arms embargo and assets freeze.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, who referred to Boko Haram’s actions as “increasingly monstrous” during a 2014 visit to Nigeria, has issued a specific warning in response to the group’s threat to sell the girls as slaves, stressing that such an act would constitute a violation of international law and could constitute crimes against humanity.⁸⁹

Members of the Security Council reportedly disagreed on whether the May 9 press statement should reference the International Criminal Court

(ICC).⁹⁰ The ICC Prosecutor reported in August 2013 that, based on a preliminary examination, “there is a reasonable basis to believe” that Boko Haram has committed crimes against humanity, namely acts of murder and persecution, resulting in the killing of more than 1,200 Christian and Muslim civilians.⁹¹ The Office of the Prosecutor has sought to assess whether Nigerian authorities are conducting “genuine proceedings” against those who may be responsible in order to determine whether a full investigation by the ICC is warranted. (Nigeria, which is a state party to the Rome Statute that established the ICC, has not referred the Boko Haram situation to the Court, but the Prosecutor, with the assent of the ICC judges, has the ability to commence an investigation on her own initiative.)

In addition to the United States, several foreign governments have offered assistance to Nigeria in its efforts to find and rescue the girls. Both the United Kingdom and France have offered experts and advisors. France hosted an international conference on the Boko Haram threat in Paris on May 17 attended by regional heads of state, including President Jonathan, and representatives of the European Union, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The conference sought to intensify regional and international mobilization, not only on cooperation to free the abducted school girls, but also to combat Boko Haram and protect victims. Israel and China have also reportedly offered assistance, although the details of their offers have not been made public.

International outrage against Boko Haram’s atrocities does not appear to have deterred attacks—three weeks after the abduction of the girls from Chibok, another eight girls, aged 12 to 15, were taken from Warabe, a Nigerian village near the Cameroon border. On May 2, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a rare attack in the country’s capital, Abuja, killing at least 19 in a bombing near a bus station that a Boko Haram cell had targeted on April 14, hours before the Chibok kidnapping. (The April 14 attack, an apparent suicide bombing, killed 75 people.) The May 5 attack on Gamboru may be Boko Haram’s deadliest attack to date, depending on the casualty count, which is disputed between local and federal officials.

End Notes

¹ For more on the group’s ideology and stated goals, see The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Background Report: Boko Haram*, May 2014. For more on the challenges in translating the Hausa word “boko”, see, e.g., Dan

Murphy, "'Boko Haram' Doesn't Really Mean 'Western Education is a Sin,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 6, 2014.

- ² For more on Nigeria, see CRS Report RL33964, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, by Lauren Ploch Blanchard.
- ³ Corruption and misrule have historically undermined state authority in Nigeria, limiting infrastructure development and social service delivery, and slowing economic growth. Development indicators are particularly low in the north, which is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations (some 80 to 90 million people). Many analysts suggest that perceived neglect and marginalization have fueled resentment among many northerners. Real or perceived disparities in access to land, jobs, and state resources underlies ethnic and religious strife in parts of the country. While Nigeria's 12 northern states use Islamic law or *sharia* to adjudicate criminal and civil matters for Muslims, some, including but not limited to Boko Haram, contend that politicians have corrupted sharia for their own gain.
- ⁴ Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights, *Countering the Threat Posed by Boko Haram*, November 13, 2013.
- ⁵ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, April 2014.
- ⁶ Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Evolving Tactics and Alliances in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel*, The Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, June 25, 2013 and "Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru After the Mali Intervention, *CTC Sentinel*, March 27, 2013; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Curbing Violence in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Insurgency*, April 2014; and "Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges," *Vanguard*, February 1, 2012.
- ⁷ U.N. Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Nigeria*, Issue 03, April 2014. See also the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, <http://www.cfr.org>, for a tally of Boko Haram attacks.
- ⁸ See, e.g., "Nigeria: Translation of Arabic Portions of Boko Haram Leader's Video on Missing College Girls," *YouTube*, Open Source Center AFR2014050844828706, May 5, 2014.
- ⁹ START, *Background Report: Boko Haram*, op. cit.
- ¹⁰ For more on religious tensions and sectarian violence in Nigeria, see, e.g., the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *Annual Report 2014: Countries of Particular Concern: Nigeria*, April 30, 2014.
- ¹¹ The states where attacks occurred most frequently included Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Plateau, Taraba, and Yobe. For accounts of atrocities attributed to Boko Haram, see, e.g., UN IRIN, "Updated Timeline of Boko Haram Attacks and Related Violence," December 12, 2013; "Boko Haram Timeline: From Preachers to Slave Raiders," *BBC*, May 13, 2013; and Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria*, October 11, 2012.
- ¹² U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "UNHCR Condemns Brutality in Nigeria, Fears New Displacement," May 9, 2014.
- ¹³ Amnesty International, "Nigerian Authorities Failed to Act on Warnings About Boko Haram Raid on School," Press Release, May 9, 2014.
- ¹⁴ For details of the attack, see, e.g., Michelle Faul, "Anatomy of a Kidnapping," *Associated Press* (AP), May 7, 2014.
- ¹⁵ For a description of these areas, see, e.g., Kayode Bodunrin, "Inside Nigeria's Sanbisa Forest," *The Nation*, April 29, 2014, and "Insurgents Regroup in the Adamawa Mountains," *Punch* (Lagos), May 21, 2013.

- ¹⁶ “Video Released by Boko Haram Claims to Show Missing Nigerian Schoolgirls,” *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), May 12, 2014. According to the State Department, 85% of the abducted girls were Christian. See Testimony of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Robert P. Jackson, Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, *#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Threat of Boko Haram*, May 15, 2014.
- ¹⁷ See, e.g., Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, *Education Under Attack 2014*, available at <http://www.protectingeducation.org> and Amnesty International, “*Keep Away from Schools or We’ll Kill You*,” *Right to Education Under Attack in Nigeria*, October 4, 2013.
- ¹⁸ “Boko Haram Leader ‘Supports’ Nigeria School Massacre,” *AFP*, July 14, 2013.
- ¹⁹ Joe Brock, “Insight: Boko Haram, Taking to Hills, Seize Slaves ‘Brides’” *Reuters*, November 17, 2013.
- ²⁰ In February 2013, for example, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a French family, with four children, in northern Cameroon. According to the State Department’s 2013 *Country Reports on Terrorism*, Boko Haram gunmen also attacked civilians in Cameroon’s far north in December 2013.
- ²¹ UNHCR, “UNHCR Condemns Brutality in Nigeria, Fears New Displacement,” May 9, 2014; UN IRIN, “Fears in Cameroon of Boko Haram Recruitment,” April 14, 2014.
- ²² “Top U.S. Commander in Africa Cautions Against Intervention in Mali Despite Al-Qaida Threat,” *AP*, December 3, 2012.
- ²³ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, April 2014.
- ²⁴ Nigeria recently signed an agreement with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and France to coordinate border policing. It complements existing border security and intelligence coordination among the Lake Chad Basin countries.
- ²⁵ BBC Monitoring, “Islamist Militant Threat Stalks Niger,” June 10, 2013; Navanti, “Niger: The Agadez, Arlit, and Niamey Prison Attacks,” June 4, 2013, prepared for U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).
- ²⁶ See, e.g., “Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists’ Reach,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013.
- ²⁷ “Nigeria: Islamic Leader Warns United States,” *AFP*, July 10, 2010.
- ²⁸ Testimony of General David Rodriguez, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Proposed Fiscal 2015 Defense Authorization for U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command*, March 6, 2014.
- ²⁹ Testimony of Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, January 29, 2014.
- ³⁰ For more on AQIM, see Samuel Aronson, “AQIM’s Threat to Western Interests in the Sahel,” and Morten Bøås, “Guns, Money, and Prayers: AQIM’s Blueprint for Security Control of Northern Mali,” *CTC Sentinel*, April 28, 2014.
- ³¹ State Department, Daily Press Briefings, May 19 and 20, 2014.
- ³² Testimony of Gen. Carter Ham, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Proposed FY2013 Defense Authorization as it Relates to the U.S. European and Africa Commands*, March 1, 2012 and House Armed Services Committee, *Proposed Fiscal 2014 Defense Authorization as it Relates to the U.S. European and Africa Commands*, March 15, 2013.
- ³³ Testimony of Admiral William H. McRaven, House Armed Services Committee, *Proposed Fiscal 2015 Defense Authorization for U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Transportation Command*, February 27, 2014.

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- ³⁴ For more, see U.N. Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011)*, U.N. Document S/2014/106, February 19, 2014.
- ³⁵ ICG, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Insurgency*, op.cit.
- ³⁶ See CRS Reports CRS Report RS21532, *Algeria: Current Issues*, by Alexis Arieff.
- ³⁷ In addition to the hostage deaths associated with the In Amenas incident, French hostages held by AQIM were killed in joint rescue operations by French and regional forces in 2010 and 2011 in Niger. In Nigeria, two European hostages were killed by Ansaru during a joint operation between Nigerian and British special forces in March 2012, and seven foreign hostages were killed by the splinter group in March 2013 in response to a perceived rescue attempt.
- ³⁸ Jacob Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria, *CTC Sentinel*, February 24, 2014.
- ³⁹ Adam Nossiter, "Vigilantes Defeat Boko Haram in its Nigerian Base," *New York Times*, October 20, 2013.
- ⁴⁰ See, e.g., Tim Cocks, "Boko Haram Exploits Nigeria's Slow Military Decline," *Reuters*, May 9, 2014 and Adam Nossiter, "Nigeria's Army Hampers Hunt for Abducted Schoolgirls," *New York Times*, May 23, 2014.
- ⁴¹ Testimony of DOD Principal Director for African Affairs Alice Friend, Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, *#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Threat of Boko Haram*, May 15, 2014.
- ⁴² ICG, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Insurgency*, op.cit.
- ⁴³ For discussion of Nigeria's slow response to international assistance offers and other issues that may constrain international cooperation, see, e.g., James Gordon Meek and Dana Hughes, "Nigeria Requested US Intel And Military Gear to Fight Terror, Docs Show," ABC News, May 9, 2014; Michelle Faul, "Nigeria Refused Help to Search for Kidnapped Girls," *Associated Press*, May 11, 2014; and Senator Christopher Coons, "Statement of Senator Coons on Status of Kidnapped Nigerian Schoolgirls," May 5, 2014.
- ⁴⁴ "Nigeria Ramps Up Search for Missing Girls," *Al Jazeera*, May 10, 2014.
- ⁴⁵ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, April 2014.
- ⁴⁶ Shekau, along with Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kambar, both of whom have ties to Boko Haram and close links to AQIM, according to the State Department, have been designated as SDGTs. Individuals and entities are designated as SDGTs under Executive Order 13224, which authorizes the blocking of their assets subject to U.S. jurisdiction and prohibits U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with or for the benefit of these persons/entities.
- ⁴⁷ Testimony of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, January 29, 2014.
- ⁴⁸ See, e.g., On Terror's New Front Line, Mistrust Blunts U.S. Strategy," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2013.
- ⁴⁹ Through the BNC dialogue, the Nigerian government requested assistance from the United States in 2013 to develop an intelligence fusion cell, the Joint Terrorist Branch (JTAB), to streamline coordination and information sharing on counterterrorism matters among key Nigerian government agencies.
- ⁵⁰ Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Linda Thomas-Greenfield, November 13, 2013, op. cit.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.

- ⁵² Nigeria was the first sub-Saharan African country named eligible for counterterrorism and border security assistance under the new Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF), although GSCF programming has yet to begin in Nigeria.
- ⁵³ State Department, Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 3, 2014.
- ⁵⁴ On May 12, the State Department indicated that the team consisted of 27 members, from various U.S. agencies.
- ⁵⁵ See, among other statements, comments by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on ABC's "This Week," May 11, 2014 and White House, Daily Press Briefing, May 14, 2014.
- ⁵⁶ State Department, Daily Press Briefing, May 12, 2014.
- ⁵⁷ The White House, Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, May 21, 2014. U.S. officials indicate that the deployed personnel will not be directly involved in rescue attempts—the notification was made because the personnel are armed to protect themselves and the aircraft.
- ⁵⁸ These provisions are included in Section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA), as amended, and recurring DOD appropriations bills, most recently P.L. 113-76. For more on these provisions, see CRS Report R43361, "*Leahy Law*" *Human Rights Provisions and Security Assistance: Issue Overview*.
- ⁵⁹ Testimony of DOD Principal Director for African Affairs Alice Friend, Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, *#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Threat of Boko Haram*, May 15, 2014.
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- ⁶² The first JTF was established in the Niger Delta. In 2009, it launched an offensive against Delta militants during which thousands of civilians were reportedly displaced.
- ⁶³ See, e.g., "Scores Killed in Nigeria Violence," *Al Jazeera*, April 23, 2013.
- ⁶⁴ Amnesty International, *Nigeria: More than 1,500 Killed in Armed Conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria in Early 2014*, op. cit.; Adam Nossiter, "Nigerian Army Facing Questions as Death Toll Soars After Prison Attack," *New York Times*, March 20, 2014; Adam Nossiter, "Bodies Pour in as Nigeria Hunts for Islamists," *New York Times*, May 7, 2013.
- ⁶⁵ Andrew Walker, "Why Nigeria Has Not Defeated Boko Haram," *BBC*, May 14, 2014.
- ⁶⁶ "Nigeria Condemns Police 'Killing,'" *BBC*, March 5, 2010.
- ⁶⁷ "Kerry: Nigeria Acknowledged Human Rights Abuses in Terror Fight," *CNN*, May 25, 2013.
- ⁶⁸ The White House, Remarks by President Obama Before Bilateral Meeting with President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria, September 23, 2014.
- ⁶⁹ Ronald Mutum, "Nigeria: FG Announces 'Soft' Counter-Terror Strategy," *Daily Trust*, March 19, 2014.
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- ⁷¹ For more on U.S. efforts to counter the LRA, see CRS Report R42094, *The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response*, by Alexis Arieff and Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

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- ⁷³ The White House, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," February 22, 2013; Eric Schmitt and Scott Sayare, "U.S. Opens Drone Base in Niger, Building Africa Presence," *New York Times*, February 22, 2013.
- ⁷⁴ Eric Schmitt, "Drones in Niger Reflect New U.S. Tack on Terrorism," *New York Times*, July 10, 2013.
- ⁷⁵ Power Africa is an Obama Administration initiative announced in mid-2013. It is designed to increase access to electricity in multiple African countries. See White House, *Fact Sheet: Power Africa*, June 30, 2013.
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- ⁷⁷ State Department, Daily News Briefing, November 13, 2013.
- ⁷⁸ Tim Cocks, "Nigerian Islamists Got \$3.15 Million to Free French Hostages - Document," *Reuters*, April 26, 2013.
- ⁷⁹ Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's International Connections," *CTC Sentinel*, January 14, 2013.
- ⁸⁰ The U.N. sanctions regime applies to individuals, groups, undertakings, or entities associated with Al Qaeda as outlined in Security Council Resolution 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and subsequent resolutions, including 2083 (2012). In designating Boko Haram, the Sanctions Committee declared the group to be associated with Al Qaeda for "participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf of, or in support of" Al Qaeda and AQIM. The Committee identified the relationship with AQIM as one for "training and material support purposes." Two Sahel-based groups associated with AQIM were added to the U.N. list in December 2012 and March 2013.
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- ⁸⁵ James Gordon Meek and Dana Hughes, "Debates in DC Delayed Action on Boko Haram, Officials Say," ABC News, May 8, 2014.
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support from France, the UK, and the United States, but Chad, Russia, and Rwanda objected to any ICC reference.

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Chapter 4

TESTIMONY OF DR. DAFNA H. RAND, CENTER FOR A NEW AMERICAN SECURITY. HEARING ON "THREAT POSED BY THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL), AL-QA'IDA, AND OTHER ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS"*

In 2014, the global terrorist threat has evolved, driven by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shams (ISIS), its military victories in Iraq, and the inspiration it engenders among radical jihadists worldwide. The threat posed by ISIS should not be overstated, however, and ISIS' rise does not diminish or supplant the threat from other terrorist groups intent on attacking U.S. interests. Core al-Qai'da (AQ) continues to plot even as its capabilities have been diminished.¹ In Syria, AQ affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) poses a considerable threat to Syrian civilians and to U.S. interests in the region.² Global AQ affiliates such as al-Qai'da in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qai'da in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) may rush to emulate, to compete, or to cooperate with ISIS.

Therefore, the United States and its allies now enter a period of dangerous competition among the global jihadist movements – for legitimacy, for adherents, for foreign fighters, and, most importantly, for a proven track record of success. In this complex dynamic of global jihadi terrorism, the

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individual fighters, their organizational affiliations, and the organizations themselves are fluid. Previous testimonies before this Committee have focused on how these general trends came about and how to respond to this variegated global terrorism landscape using all available Intelligence Community tools.³

This testimony focuses on the longer-term solutions, in particular, by outlining four critical areas where sustainable counterterrorism efforts are required. Current Congressional discussions are rightly focused on the immediate means of defeating ISIS in Syria and Iraq.⁴ Last week, the President outlined a strategy involving military force to target ISIS using U.S. airpower, military assistance to partners operating on the ground, preventative measures to limit ISIS attack capabilities, and a comprehensive humanitarian response. The United States is now joined by a broad and diverse coalition of regional and Western nations in implementing the above strategy. Such a multilateral approach, including the commitments by Arab partners in support of U.S. military actions, is unprecedented.⁵ It will help to mitigate the potential negative perceptions of this U.S. military intervention in the Arab world.

Thus, U.S. allies share the threat perception and have committed to working with the United States to degrade and to destroy ISIS. It is critical for the United States to build on this multilateral cooperation, translating the regional and global consensus on ISIS to focus on four particular longer-term counterterrorism efforts: reaching specific diplomatic agreements with Arab, Turkish, and European allies; conducting effective counter-radicalization messaging campaigns, including countering violent extremist programs; implementing counter-financing strategies to diminish funds flowing to ISIS and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq; and increasing U.S.-led assistance efforts to address gaps in governance, institutions, and the rule-of-law in the Arab world.

THE COMPETITIVE ISLAMIST LANDSCAPE

The threats that are emerging from ISIS, JN and AQ, within Iraq and Syria and beyond, reflect the systematic changes that are shaping the global terrorist threat. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the global jihadi movement has taken advantage of the greater number of weak states in the Arab world and the porosity of borders among them in order to spread, decentralizing jihadi networks. As NCTC Director Matthew Olsen recently noted, jihadi terrorists are active in over eleven insurgencies in the Muslim world.⁶ In the meantime, across the region, institutions intended to buttress the rule-of-law – whether

courts, police services, or local governance structures – are often weak and under-resourced. Because of the diffusion of these groups, there is greater potential for personal and organizational competition, reflected in the current tensions between ISIS and core AQ/JN. While AQ remains the official leader of the global jihadist movement,⁷ there is greater autonomy among the AQ affiliates, from AQIM to AQAP, because of the trends toward decentralization.

This competitive, diverse, and diffuse jihadi landscape has a number of implications for the United States. First, the threat from core AQ, while potentially diminished, nonetheless endures. In early September 2014, AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri publicly announced the formation of an AQ branch on the Indian subcontinent, targeting India, a key U.S. counterterrorism ally.⁸ While the long-term impact of al-Zawahiri's announcement remains to be seen, the timing suggests a signal from core AQ to the international jihadist movement that it will not cede its global leadership role to challengers such as ISIS.

Second, AQ's Syria affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) continues to threaten the United States and its allies.⁹ Analysts have argued that Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of JN who has pledged his allegiance to al-Zawahiri and to AQ core, is restructuring his organization toward a long-term competition with ISIS by recruiting larger numbers of the foreign fighters flowing into Syria.¹⁰ There is evidence that JN remains popular among Jordanian jihadists, posing an internal security threat to a key U.S. ally in the region.¹¹

Third, the competition between JN and ISIS could take on a "race to the bottom" dynamic that in and of itself is destabilizing and threatening to U.S. interests. Each group could find that it needs to up the ante by increasing its anti-Western focus, both ideologically and operationally, as a way to attract followers. A sensational plot against a Western target could become a means for both groups to assert their jihadist supremacy. In the meantime, the competition between JN and ISIS – and by extension between AQ and ISIS – is very bloody and will complicate U.S. and allied efforts to support a cohesive, moderate Syrian opposition. There is a long-standing dispute between Abu Muhammad al-Julani and ISIS' commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, including an assassination attempt against al-Julani that was reportedly ordered by al-Baghdadi in May 2013.¹² JN fighters were prominent participants in January's rebel offensive against ISIS, an ultimately unsuccessful campaign that was at the time called "Syria's second revolution."¹³ In February 2014, ISIS assassinated Abu Khalid al-Suri, a

Syrian al-Qaida strategist who served as a liaison between Ahrar al-Sham and AQ's global leadership.¹⁴

Meanwhile, AQ has tried to publicly distance itself from ISIS' methods and draw a more positive contrast between JN's tactics and those of its rival. In February, core AQ disavowed its ties with ISIS over reports of ISIS' brutality against Syrian civilians and rebels. In August 2014, JN released the journalist Peter Theo Curtis, a U.S. citizen that it had held hostage since October 2012, after the intervention of Qatari authorities.¹⁵ On September 11, JN released 45 Fijian United Nations peacekeepers that had been seized near the Golan Heights, suggesting that the group is trying to draw a "more moderate" distinction between itself and ISIS.¹⁶ Such a distinction is a mirage, however, given the violent tactics that JN has utilized against Syrian civilians. While significant organizational and leadership conflicts exist between AQ and ISIS, both organizations are ultimately seeking the same goal: using violence to institute a sharia-based state in the lands that they control.¹⁷ ISIS, JN, and AQ threaten the stability of the Middle East by challenging the state boundaries that have existed in the region since the end of the First World War and are providing a training ground for Arab, Western, and other global foreign fighters.¹⁸ In short, whether they compete with each other, or pursue their similar ends on parallel paths, both ISIS and AQ threaten U.S. interests in the Middle East and beyond.

SUSTAINABLE, LONGER-TERM COUNTER TERRORISM RESPONSES

Given that the threat landscape is more diverse, diffuse, and internally competitive, the counterterrorism response must be multilateral in nature, to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Indeed, President Obama's four-part strategy for defeating ISIS, as articulated on September 10, 2014, is founded on an important premise: Perhaps more than at any moment since September 11, 2001, a productive consensus is emerging among the United States, its Western allies, and the key regional powers (and their citizens) on the need for a strong and unambiguous response to the terrorist threat. To sustain and strengthen this consensus, U.S. airstrikes, intelligence support and assistance, and military training and assistance must be complemented by muscular diplomatic work. The current convergence in threat perception in the region can translate into practical regional and multilateral cooperation. There

are four particular areas where coordinated action can help to address the longer-term terrorist threat:

1) Translate Multilateralism into Results

Currently, there is a great deal of convergence among the United States, its Western allies, and regional Middle East powers on the assessment of the threats posed by ISIS. Using this common threat perception as a foundation, the United States must push these allies even further, through private diplomatic pressures, to execute meaningful domestic actions and decisions. For example, the European and Turkish allies must secure their external borders and improve border security within Europe, in order to disrupt the travel of foreign extremists into Syria and Iraq from Europe's southern and eastern rim. Many partners in Europe will need help – and in some cases prodding – to identify and disrupt the travel and financing of foreign fighters and their facilitators. The Global Counterterrorism Fund (GCTF) offers one multilateral venue to improve border security capacity across North Africa and Europe, in a way that seeks to slow the flow of foreign fighters to Syria.

In addition, U.S. diplomats should continue to push several European governments where there is legislation pending to criminalize unauthorized participation in a foreign war. Such legislation will not in all cases stop the flow of foreign fighters, but may at least provide an additional law enforcement tool in countries that do not already prosecute for such crimes. Although most of these countries have already passed laws that penalize membership in particular designated groups, such as ISIS or the al-Nusra Front, the collection of reliable evidence tracing European citizen participation within these groups remains difficult.¹⁹ It is usually far simpler to criminalize participation in foreign wars than to prosecute based on alleged membership in designated terrorist groups. U.S. diplomats should engage institutions such as the European Union, Europol, and Interpol to ensure a coherent and collaborative European domestic law enforcement implementation regime. The new United Nations Security Council Resolution that President Obama will introduce in New York next week offers a concrete vehicle to promote higher standards for domestic counterterrorism legislation.²⁰

Finally, with Turkey and the Arab Gulf states, it is critical that the United States not only push for a coalition against ISIS but also for greater consensus on the particulars of how to resolve the Syrian conflict. The persistence of this conflict is one of the greatest drivers of jihadi terrorism and is creating the instability throughout the region upon which jihadi networks thrive. The

United States should work with its allies to forge a clear, specific picture of the Syrian end game, based on a number of principles: de-escalation among the conflicting parties, de-centralization of power away from the regime, and diffusion of the sectarianism fueling the fighting. The Gulf states and Turkey must come to terms with the practical recognition that any short-term resolution of the conflict will likely involve a number of locally-governed territories, linked through a loose power-sharing system as part of a protracted transition that eventually ends the Assad rule.

The September 7, 2014 Arab League announcement of collective security in the face of the ISIS threat is a very promising development. In an historic decision, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has agreed to host a base on its territory to train moderate Syrian oppositionists to fight ISIS and the regime. The first challenge here will be to define with greater clarity which groups comprise the Syrian “moderate opposition.” There are many other non-ISIS but powerful Islamist trends within the Syrian rebellion, and many of them might be considered “moderate” by our allies but not by the United States. Second, the Arab League and Turkey need to reach consensus with the United States and other regional actors on what the transfer of executive authority means if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad rejects a transitional government. Can *de facto* power sharing occur in Syria absent an actual brokered agreement, by freezing the current conflict and slowly eroding the regime’s executive power over time? Third, the Arab League states and Turkey must begin discussing who will rule the territory liberated from ISIS. Rather than allow it to fall back into regime hands, it might be necessary to begin planning for a liberated zone under United Nations and Arab League control.

2) Ensure that Counter-Radicalization Messages are Data-Driven

Second, U.S. efforts should also remain focused on the sources of radicalization – the ideas and beliefs that are influencing individuals to join the fight in the Levant and Iraq, where 12,000 foreign fighters have joined ISIS, al-Nusra, and the other jihadist groups. Allegedly, nearly 3,000 of these foreign fighters are from Tunisia alone.²¹ In the post-September 2001 period, the U.S. government found it difficult to ensure that these messaging campaigns were effective in the Arab world.²² Policymakers must first agree on the right messages that will influence the ideological arc of jihadist organizations as well as their appeal to foreign recruits. Then, policymakers must determine which modalities, voices, surrogates, and influencers can best transmit these messages across diverse parts of the Arab and Muslim world.

Messaging efforts are complex, in part because it is often uncertain how they will be received by the intended audiences.

That said, the U.S. government has thirteen years of data at its disposal.²³ This is information that can be analyzed to build an effective counter-radicalization campaign, including by taking into account the vast use of social media by the jihadists movements and those who ideologically sympathize with them. A data-driven analysis should inform the approach of the State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), which has developed a pilot program for English-speaking international audiences. The twitter hashtag “#thinkagainturnaway” seeks to dissuade radicalization by highlighting the brutality of terrorist organizations.²⁴

More work needs to be done to determine which types of messaging would actually deter would-be jihadi recruits and which messages reach putative sympathizers. For example, it is unclear whether exposure to the brutality of the terrorist organizations and the violence that they are committing against Syrian and Iraqi civilians is dissuading would-be jihadists. In fact, the brutality might entice certain individuals to join. There is some initial evidence to suggest that publicizing the internal inconsistencies within the doctrine and practices of various Islamist and jihadi groups can be particularly effective in repulsing Westerners in particular, but also those in the region, from joining.²⁵ By participating in Twitter, Facebook, and other social media conversations begun by ISIS and al-Nusra, using text and videos, the State Department's CSCC and other U.S. government messaging efforts can make ISIS and its ilk look incompetent or hypocritical. In short, any messaging campaign must be tailored – to the Western foreign fighters, to the Arab foreign fighters from different parts of the Middle East, and to those in Syria and Iraq, as well as to those who might be supporting ISIS, AQ, or other groups.

3) Design a New Counter-Finance Strategy

Third, national security planners should consider all available economic statecraft tools to target and squeeze the extremists' assets. ISIS or AQ leaders' decision-making about whether to pursue a large-scale attack against the West could come ultimately turn on the question of financial viability. A counter-financing strategy against ISIS, al-Nusra, and other groups would begin with increasing U.S. resources dedicated to intelligence collection and analysis on the financing dimension. The operational strategy would involve a number of components, prioritizing the continued targeting of private donors,

particularly in the Gulf countries, who have and may still be providing cash to al-Nusra and other groups. There is evidence that U.S. partners are becoming more cooperative in this domain than they have been in the past.²⁶ As discussed above, however, there may remain different understandings between the United States and its allies regarding which elements of the Syrian opposition are appropriate to support.²⁷

Second, targeted financial measures could be effective, including by sanctioning banks, couriers, and other entities that might be connected to the extremist groups. A greater focus by the United States on entities and individuals providing “material support” to known bad actors would identify and publicize those individuals involved in the financing of ISIS and other groups. Many financial institutions, corporations, and governments around the world use the list of those banned via U.S. targeted financial measures to impose their own domestic constraints on identified entities and individuals, so a U.S. ban would have a global mimicry effect.

Focusing on ISIS’ sources of economic funds in the areas now under its control is key because ISIS, unlike other extremist groups fighting in Syria and Iraq, may not depend as much on foreign patronage.²⁸ In order to target ISIS coffers in particular, it is necessary for the United States to help the Kurds, Turks, and the Iraqi government analyze ISIS financial information collected in raids and from informants, and then use that information to plan counter-finance operations. The United States has significant experience in this regard and could employ the expertise developed by the Treasury/Department of Defense Afghan Threat Finance Cell initiative. Iraqi and Kurdish forces should continue to focus militarily on pushing back ISIS from the oil production sites it has seized in northern Iraq, and to restrict its ability to process oil at its refining facilities in eastern Syria. The Iraqi government must also engage Turkey, Jordan and the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds to prevent ISIS from seizing any additional oil facilities in the region. A related part of this strategy requires communicating the danger to the global oil industry – traders, shippers, insurers, and purchasers. Global energy industry firms must be aware of the risks.²⁹

To achieve results, any U.S. counter-financing strategy must begin by building consensus at home. Across the Intelligence Community, agencies must agree that counter-financing efforts are critical to limiting the operational capacity of terrorist organizations in general, and therefore efforts to track the financiers of terrorist organizations must rank high as an analytic and operational priority.

4) Support Strong Governance in the Arab World

Fourth, over the next weeks and months, the U.S. policy debate will rightly focus on the immediate threat environment, particularly as ISIS, AQ, and its affiliates respond to the U.S. strategy as well as the military actions. Planning the military response to the threat, however, should not preclude simultaneously considering the underlying drivers of the jihadist problem, particularly across the weak states in the Middle East and North Africa. U.S. policymakers must renew their interest in supporting the development of the rule of law in many parts of this region, not only because it will provide immediate security advantages in the fight against ISIS, but also because good governance and economic opportunity will be critical to counterterrorism over the long term. In Iraq, it is clear that an inclusive, representative and accountable government is an essential first step in the counterterrorism response to ISIS.

The ideal of good governance may seem far off at this moment, given the beheadings, the cruelty, the loss of life, and the carnage that have spilled across Syria and Iraq. Ultimately, however, strong and effective institutions at the local and national level, which provide services and jobs, opportunities and fairness, are the best way to shield communities in the Arab and Muslim worlds from the rise of future groups similar to ISIS and to defeat the ISIS ideology.³⁰ Before the Arab Spring, there were too many strong states that were unjust; they might have kept out certain terrorist groups for their own narrow, self-interested reasons, but even as they appeared to be capable counterterrorism partners, particularly for tactical purposes, they were sowing the seeds at home of future terrorist threats. Today, this problem of authoritarian repression endures in some parts of the region. Simultaneously, there are a number of newly weakened states undergoing transitions – including Tunisia, Yemen, and Iraq. Supporting successful institution-building and fair, equitable, and effective governance in both types of states is a critical priority for counterterrorism across the region.

In the near term, this has practical implications for Congress. As it considers the proposed Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) and defines a method for strengthening partners' capacity for effective counterterrorism, Congress should look for opportunities to fund governance, institution-building, and security sector reform programs that may strengthen the rule of law in the Middle East and North Africa in particular. The bulk of the CTPF funding will rightly focus on improving the capabilities of partner security services to fight terrorism, to prevent the flow of foreign fighters, and

to ensure that internal security services can fairly oversee the law enforcement and homeland security requirements necessary to combat the terrorist threat. Some amount of CTPF funding should also be dedicated to the longer-term problem, however.

Building up the capacity of regional security services will not alone solve the problem of why the jihadist groups continue to proliferate and why they are finding adherents. Addressing the deficits in economic and political opportunity in many of the states in the region is an important and complementary counterterrorism objective. U.S. assistance programs, if used wisely, can support the development of stronger, fairer national and local governance structures. While it is true that some such U.S.-funded programs to support governance efforts have been unsuccessful or poorly received across the Middle East and North Africa, Congress can help the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other agencies by setting and holding high standards for both the type of assistance available through the CTPF and the expectations for outcomes. Setting high standards will ensure that U.S. assistance is spent effectively to help regional government institutions deliver the rule of law, economic opportunity, and public goods.

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